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#36

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

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COMICS INTERVIEW

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UP FRONT

Having previously made short shrift of procuring projects, selecting formats, and other esoterica of publishing, it's time to tackle printers.

Naturally, if you wish to publish, it should occur to you to get prices (called "quotes" in the industry, but don't quote me on that). Forget it. Printers have a way of quoting, say, 1¢ per book and only later when the job is done, informing you that, of course, the cover, binding, trimming, packing, negatives, phone calls, ink, paper, staples are all extra costs. Another favorite trick is the "print date" deadline which they will promise to meet. Don't fall for that old chestnut — it's still got to go through the bindery and shipping department. If you want to see a printer squirm and sweat, ask for the "ship date."

Printers are even more creative than comics creators with excuses:" a press part broke that has to be flown in from Heidelberg," "we had to hold up all jobs to stop and print secret government stuff," are only a couple of the more common stories you can expect as a publisher.

You'll hear them all. Believe me, I have. And yet, after a while, like a masochist craving mistreatment, you'll actually come to feel a perverse bond of fellowship with your printer.

Until you get the bill, that is.

-Dave

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SOUTHERN KNIGHTS #15. **The Goddess Morrigan walks the earth once more and—aided by a reincarnated Druid—thirsts for Dragon's blood! (First of two parts.)** *Story: HENRY VOGEL. Art: MARK PROPST.*

"My Dredd was originally an occult person."

PAT MILLS

Pat Mills is one of Britain's best-known comics writers, and the man largely responsible for the creation of 2000 A.D. His stories have ranged from romance strips to the celtic barbarian sword and sorcery of Slaine. He's currently working with Kevin O'Neill on a graphic novel for DC. This interview took place at Pat's Colchester home on 18th of February this year, and was picked up again on the 21st of March after a tape was erased under mysterious circumstances...

PAT MILLS: I'm very woolly on the early stuff, because quite apart from my cold I just don't remember much about it.

FRANK PLOWRIGHT: *Well, the first thing I'd like to know is how you started writing comics. It's not as if the British comics are written largely by ex-fans as is the case in the USA.*

PAT: I started with D.C. Thompson when I was 21 or 22. You start in a general fiction pool and they decide which magazine you're suited to. For some reason they decided that I was suited to a magazine called ROMEO, which included a very large section of romantic comics stories. ROMEO was printed on the most god-awful bog paper, so the only thing it could really sell on was the quality of its stories. It meant that the writers had to put everything they'd got into the stories and it gave me a good introduction to what makes a story work and what doesn't.

Up until then I'd just had the usual BEANO and DANDY background, I knew nothing about comics and wasn't particularly interested in them. I was really impressed by seeing the artwork in original size and there was the usual argument of seeing stuff in print and thinking "That's crap, I can write better than that." Going freelance was my ultimate objective and having had a training in picture strips I obviously wanted to put it to some use. I went freelance and went for the IPC market.

FRANK: *There's all sorts of horror stories of what things are like at D.C. Thompson.*

PAT: Oh, they're all true.

FRANK: *There was one I heard about*

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Patrick Mills
Occupation: Writer
Born: 1949, Ipswich, England.
Credits: DOCTOR WHO comic, DAN DARE (Eagle version), JUDGE DREDD, ABC WARRIORS, created 2000 A.D.
Currently Writing: "Nemesis the Warlock" and "Slaine the Barbarian" in 2000 A.D., METALZOIC — the DC Comics graphic novel.

PAT MILLS

"2000 A.D. was the first comic to

rooms full of artists almost chained to the board with a monitor walking round.

PAT: That's true. It was like something out of **Dickens.** They all used to sit at boards raised at angles like old ledger desks, and in fact the accounts section could be straight out of Scrooge. The firm is heavily paternalistic in the worst sense of the word, but they are the very best place to get a training in comics simply because they are so old fashioned and there's nothing flashy about them at all. It's like learning the three R's. You learn what makes a story work in the most mechanical manner. They know how to put your finger on the pulse, and I learned more in the one year or so that I was at D.C. Thompson than in any subsequent period except for fairly recently. If you look at IPC most of the people who have been responsible for comics are ex-D.C. Thompson people. That isn't just coincidence, it's that they give a far better training than anyone else.

FRANK: *That's like the TV system where everybody learns at the BBC and then goes to an independent company for more money?*

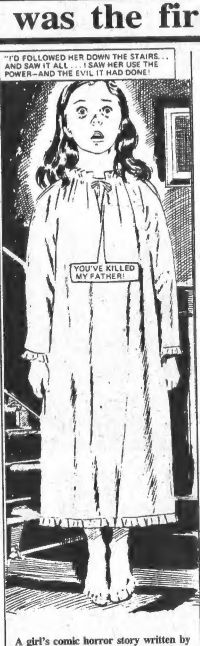
PAT: Yes, it's the BBC of the comics world and has all the disadvantages of the BBC. After D.C. Thompson, I went freelance and **John Wagner** joined me very shortly afterwards. We worked together in a garden shed for about a year, which is pretty appalling, but we broke into just about every IPC market, and we needed to, as there were two of us. We wrote for the "fun" comics like 'COR and WHIZZER AND CHIPS, we wrote for the girls', comics and we wrote for the titles that are now defunct on the boys', side like LION and JET . . .

FRANK: *Ah, the infamous JET.*

PAT: Well, they accepted our first script, and that's a bad sign, but I'm always grateful to **Geoff Kemp**, the editor of JET, because he gave me my start. Some of the stories we wrote in those days were really appalling, and the trouble with writing rubbish is that it does take a long while to get out of it into something better.

FRANK: *It's complacency, I suppose?*

PAT: Yes, it's a mixture of that and, whatever kind of writing you do, you get into a groove and you stick with that groove, and if you're doing something else you suddenly have to make a psychological jump. Also when you're only in your early 20s it's difficult to know whether the reason that you're finding it hard not to write rubbish is because you're not a very good writer. It's only in retrospect you can look back and say, "No wonder I had so much trouble with that, because it's absolute garbage." The boys' stuff was particularly dire, stories that I'd prefer to forget.



A girl's comic horror story written by Pat and drawn by Ken Armstrong.

FRANK: *So you don't want me dragging them out?*

PAT: I can laugh at them now. They were really dreadful stories like "Yellowknife of the Yard" in VALIANT, which was about a Red Indian detective at Scotland Yard.

FRANK: *Who came up with that idea?*

PAT: The original idea wasn't as bad as it sounds. It was to be a really lunatic thing handled a bit like a MONTY PYTHON story. There's a sketch about a highwayman who goes around handing out daffodils, and that was the way we wanted to handle "Yellowknife of the Yard," really humorous and surrealistic. Beneath his wigwam there was a massive disco, and things like that. It was turned into an all around adventure strip, lost its satirical edge and became one of these ghastly stories that were produced in the early '70s, of which the classic example was a story in JET called "The Four Sergeants." There was an English sergeant, an Irish sergeant and a Welsh and Scottish sergeant and one of them tied knots in tank barrels. It was substudent humour, absolutely hideous because it wasn't funny in a slapstick way and it wasn't funny in a satirical way, it was just bad. The other JET classic was "Paddy McGinty's Goat," about a kid who had an alien goat. Everything got pulled down to that level. I think that period in British comics did tremendous damage.

FRANK: *That would have been just after the time that I started looking at British comics.*

PAT: You probably looked at stories of guys tying knots in tank barrels and stories about idiot Red Indian inspectors at Scotland Yard and turned to something with more merit. It took a long while to come round from that, and I think even today there is still a danger of comics sinking back into a morass that's waiting to drag them down.

FRANK: *So how did you progress from being pennyless writers in the garden shed to becoming editors?*

PAT: We weren't pennyless writers, we were actually doing quite well. If you can write fast you can make a very good living at comics, probably better than any other form of writing, until you get into the best seller market. The tragedy is that because the companies buy all the rights the incentive is not to take pleasure in the characters you write, but how many scripts you can produce in a day. When I first met other comic writers of the old school the conversation revolved around, "I can write two scripts a day," and I used to feel really bad about admitting that it took me two days to write a script, and I'm still a bit fartive about it. It's very sad that this is so and it pulls the whole business down.

FRANK: *For most British comics there's also no appreciation beyond the pay cheque.*

PAT: No, and I think 2000 A.D. is the only comic to have changed that mould, perhaps not as much as it could have done, but to some extent. Where were we — ?

FRANK: *In the garden shed.*

PAT: Then I moved south and was working on the IPC girls' comics for a while and the boys' comic market was running

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make it on a strong visual look."

into tremendous trouble, and with stories like "The Four Sergeants" you can understand the reasons, The girls' comics market was relatively bouyant because it was all influenced by D.C. Thompson people, and IPC realized that they could apply the lessons that had revived the girls' comics when they had been going through a silly phase. Girls don't want to read silly pony or princess stories, and there was a new type of story coming through on the girls' side. They wanted that reflected on the boys' side, and so they approached John and me and asked us to produce a boys' comic for them — something to rival D.C. Thompson's WARLORD, which had been a very big success. So that's how we started BATTLE.

FRANK: *BATTLE was very violent?*

PAT: Yes. When you move away from what has gone before you're invarably going to react against it very strongly. In the past all the stories were so bloody wet. Nobody was allowed to be killed, you couldn't have people with knives or any of that stuff. Once you take away the controls and go for reality you have to find a level at which to draw the line, and to begin with it's very difficult to know where. This is coupled with the fact that if you have to produce it in a hurry, as IPC always do, you can't give a violent story a quality that doesn't make the violence seem gratuitous. If you look at BATTLE you can see that some of the things have been stuck in for the sake of it, and that's a result of speed. We were given some ridiculous deadlines.

FRANK: *Why were you approached to create the comic? The impression I had about British comics was that they were committee-created in house and then foisted out.*

PAT: That is very often the case, but they saw that these two guys were producing relatively good stories on the girls' comics and we had ideas and an editorial background from D.C. Thompson, and they came to us. I think all the comics that haven't worked have been produced by a committee and that's why they're so dire. Look at the number of failures that IPC have had recently.

FRANK: *It seems that nothing has succeeded since 2000 A.D.*

SO I DIDN'T KILL YA, YOU MANGEY HAG? WELL, YOU AIN'T GONNA LIVE FOR LONG!
I STILL GOT MY KNIFE... AND I'M GONNA SLIT YOUR THROAT...
...'COS YOU GOT WHAT I NEED TO SAVE MY BUDDY JOE!

© 1978 IPC

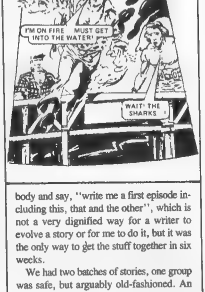
A serendipitous choice of names, in this case the human, Reagan, from FLESH, written by Pat and drawn by Ramon Soca.

"I think even today there is a danger of

PAT: Well, the only thing that I can think of is the revived EAGLE, which I regard with deep embarrassment, but it's a success in that it's still around. I think the only reason that it is still around is that it's conned enough fathers who want to re-live their childhood by buying EAGLE for their son. I think it's a miserable comic. The other thing that I should say about BATTLE, and this will give you an idea of the weird set-up, was that the people inside had no idea that we were producing BATTLE. If the office people knew that two freelancers were producing something they would all feel that their jobs were on the line and it would also be a threat to their authority, and so it had to be produced in secret. We had to keep our office door closed, and people kept asking what we were doing in there, and we used to say that we were producing a comic in braille or something like that. We didn't take their jobs away, we wanted to remain freelance and we passed BATTLE over to a staff member, and so had actually created jobs, but there was a lot of bad feeling about it at the time.

FRANK: *BATTLE was followed by ACTION, which is seen as a precursor to 2000 A.D.*

PAT: ACTION was just me, because by that time John had gone on to some other comic. I think I was given something like six weeks to get together enough scripts to start it. That's a hell of a tall order, and to begin with I had no idea which way ACTION was going to go. I got together a whole range of stories, and I got them all written up and drawn. What I would tend to do was come up with an idea, call somebody and say, "write me a first episode including this, that and the other", which is not a very dignified way for a writer to evolve a story or for me to do it, but it was the only way to get the stuff together in six weeks.

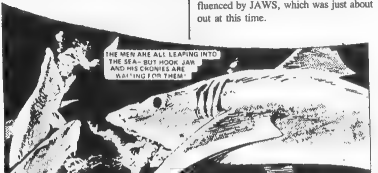


We had two batches of stories, one group was safe, but arguably old-fashioned. An example of one that never saw the light of day, because it fell into that category, was "Hawk of the Speedway," which was about a motorcycle cop who was also a speedway rider, and there was obviously a conflict of loyalties between his job on the speedway track. It was a mechanical D.C. Thompson type of story, not a silly story but it's hardly going to set the world alight. Then there was the other type of story that was emerging, like some kind of monster out of a swamp, the really gruesome stories like "Hookjaw." Hookjaw was this great white shark with a massive hook projecting from his bottom lip from an encounter with an unfortunate angler, who he made a meal of in the opening episode, frame one. It was obviously influenced by JAWS, which was just about out at this time.

There were these two groups of stories, and everyone agreed, myself included, that the violent stories had what it took. We went ahead and ran them, using the rules that we'd learnt in BATTLE, that kids like violent stories in the DIRTY HARRY mould, and it worked.

My job was to start the thing and move on, which makes sense, because you have an editor appointed and you're always going to get friction between the editor and the creator. So IPC were left with a violent comic and no-one to edit it. They chose a guy called **John Smith** who was Managing Editor of the nursery group of comics and had no experience of boys' comics at all. So he did what he was told, that the comic was to be violent, to be contemporary and all the rest of it, but he didn't draw the line at the point that I would have done and the stories got stronger and stronger.

By this time I was working on 2000 A.D. and I could see the crash coming when they showed me a cover for "Kids Rule O.K.," which was a sort of LORD OF THE FLIES set in an urban environment, and it showed a skinhead swinging a chain and a policeman on the ground with his helmet knocked off. I went white, and it still gives me the shakes. If you produce things at that speed without time to sleep on things and for measured restraint to take effect it's bound to happen, and I set the ball rolling so I'm as involved as everybody else. The stories before the crunch came were diabolical. One rejoiced under the title of "Probationer" and there was "Death Game 1999," which was a brilliant idea suggested by **Geoff Kemp** about a game called Spinball. What it was, was a gigantic pinball table and players had to score points by hit-



Next—An overcrowded helicopter tries to take off from the rig and...Yes, you guessed it!

Hookjaw and his pals get the bite on some fresh flesh.

© 1979 IPC

comics sinking back into a morass . . . ”

© 1978 IPC

ting a ball against these pinball buffers. It was like ROLLERBALL with one lot going around on ice skates, and another bunch were on motorcycles, all hitting each other with hockey sticks, and kids were writing in saying that they played spinball on their bikes. You don't realize what's going to happen until it all evolves, and you suddenly find that you're riding a nightmare.

A **Belardinelli** scene showed one of these bikers who'd just been knocked off his bike, and somehow or other his stomach had been cut open, and his intestines were wound around the entire page. **Belardinelli** draws things with such beautiful brushwork that it looked really elegant and I didn't realize what it was when I first saw it. I thought it looked interesting and then realized with horror what he'd drawn. Even ACTION realized they'd gone too far. That was never printed and it's probably locked away in some vault.

The other aspects of ACTION got lost along the way. There was a feature in there called "Action Man" where I persuaded Steve MacManus, who's now editor of 2000 A.D., to do something quite dangerous each week. He'd get in a cage with a snake, or go down a sewer. That was a nice idea, and so was "Money Man." Money Man would turn up in a different town each week and, if you could come up to him with your copy of ACTION, you could claim 5 pounds. They had Money Man in Colchester once, and I realized the problem involved because all these kids were looking for him, and when they saw him they'd all run across the road in front of the traffic. I could picture a headline saying: "Kid killed In Search for Money Man."

ACTION was one of those comics that was really fated for something awful to happen. The most sick guys would write to Steve as Action Man with all kinds of appalling suggestions that I'm not going to repeat. Of course, the inevitable happened. ACTION was banned and **John Smith** went back to the Nursery group.

FRANK: *Who banned it?*

PAT: I don't know the full story, but newspapers did various articles on it and I think there was a possibility that it could have gone to the Department of Public Prosecutions. All I heard officially was when I was called down with everyone else who had been involved with the wretched thing and told that ACTION was coming off the market, it was going to be cleaned up, and then it was going on the market again. They got a very straightlaced guy to knacker the comic, brought it out in a castrated form and it was just a wimp comic that died and went into BATTLE.

FRANK: *BATTLE, ACTION and 2000 A.D. were a new thing for IPC in that they had a theme. IPC had stayed clear of that in the past.*

PAT: IPC still have a tendency towards the old-fashioned comic where a miscellania of stories appear under some very loose theme — if there is a theme at all. I think theme comics stand a much better chance of working than any other.

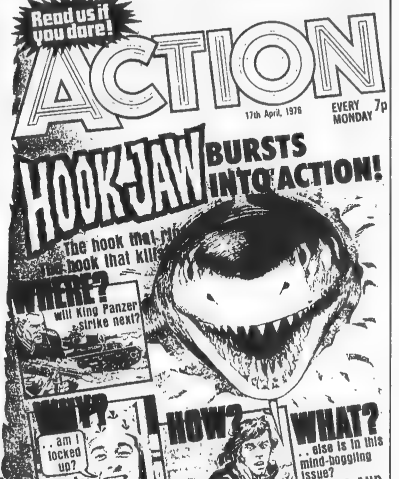
FRANK: *You were reunited with John for the creation of 2000 A.D.?*

PAT: No, John wasn't actually involved in the creation of 2000 A.D., I don't know why Nick **Landau** thought that (see COMICS INTERVIEW #7). John created Judge Dredd, which isn't the same thing at all.

The idea for a science-fiction comic came from **Kelvin Gosnell**, who was subsequently the first editor of 2000 A.D. He'd seen a newspaper article mentioning movies that were being made in Hollywood and they were saying that science fiction was going to be the next big thing. Kelvin wanted to get off his job on the competitions and showed me the article as a way of doing so, although he wasn't allowed to move until the comic was well underway.

I was given a year to do 2000 A.D., mainly because I'd left ACTION so quickly, and that meant I had a lot of time to get the comic right. At that time the stories were different, although it's easy to look back now and say, "Oh, that's crap."

The idea of concentrating on the artwork was new. 2000 A.D. was the first comic



The infamous ACTION comics magazine.

PAT MILLS

"I was particularly fond of 'Flesh.'"

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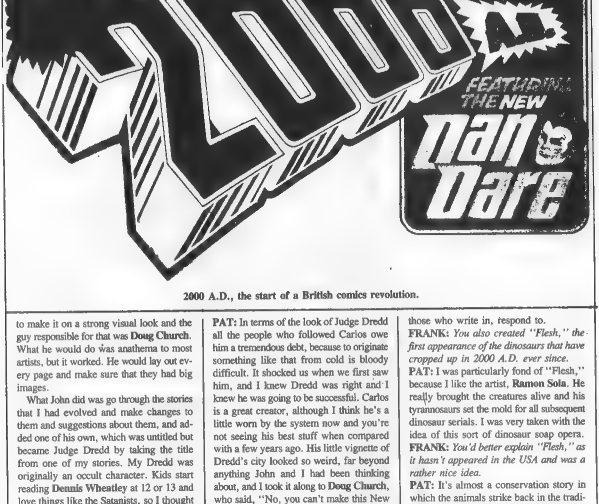

2000 A.D., the start of a British comics revolution.

to make it on a strong visual look and the guy responsible for that was **Doug Church**. What he would do was anathema to most artists, but it worked. He would lay out every page and make sure that they had big images.

What John did was go through the stories that I had evolved and make changes to them and suggestions about them, and added one of his own, which was untitled but became Judge Dredd by taking the title from one of my stories. My Dredd was originally an occult character. Kids start reading **Dennis Wheatley** at 12 or 13 and love things like the Satanists, so I thought what about a retired judge, the last hanging judge, a rather grim and frightening figure. As the comic became more science fiction this occult character was left high and dry so John asked if he could have the name for the cop.

FRANK: *I presume the name came from the old Prince Buster records?*

PAT: From a reggae group, I just saw it on a poster.

FRANK: *I was going to mention later on that all your characters have strong, evocative names. Dredd, Slaine, Nemesis...*

PAT: I don't know why that is. Of course once the guy was called Judge Dredd it opened up all kinds of possibilities — like why was he called Judge, there must be more of them, and so on. It gave a lot of justification to some of the things that Dredd was doing.

FRANK: *And Carlos Ezquerra came up with the Mega-City and designed Dredd's appearance?*

PAT: In terms of the look of Judge Dredd all the people who followed Carlos owe him a tremendous debt, because to originate something like that from cold is bloody difficult. It shocked us when we first saw him, and I knew Dredd was right and I knew he was going to be successful. Carlos is a great creator, although I think he's a little worn by the system now and you're not seeing his best stuff when compared with a few years ago. His little vignette of Dredd's city looked so weird, far beyond anything John and I had been thinking about, and I took it along to **Doug Church**, who said, "No, you can't make this New York — as was originally intended — make this a Mega-City. Let's have it stretching right along the seaboard."

FRANK: *Did any of the other characters go through great changes?*

PAT: MACH 1 was originally very violent, and that's never been shown, thank god. He was doing thing like punching holes in people.

FRANK: *MACH 1 was a six-million-dollar-type character.*

PAT: Kids wanted instant impact in the early stages, not originality, and for the first three weeks he was the lead character. The stories that had aesthetic potential were much slower burners. "Harlem's Heroes" didn't take off until **Dave Gibbons** introduced Artie Gruber, and then it immediately went up. It was the problem you're up against every time you think you mustn't be too violent and corrupt the kids. It's the action and horror that the readers, or at least those who write in, respond to.

FRANK: *You also created "Flesh," the first appearance of the dinosaurs that have cropped up in 2000 A.D. ever since.*

PAT: I was particularly fond of "Flesh," because I like the artist, **Ramon Sola**. He really brought the creatures alive and his tyrannosaurs set the mold for all subsequent dinosaur serials. I was very taken with the idea of this sort of dinosaur soap opera.

FRANK: *You'd better explain "Flesh," as it hasn't appeared in the USA and was a rather nice idea.*

PAT: It's almost a conservation story in which the animals strike back in the tradition of **James Herbert's** THE RATS, a disaster world and I wondered why on earth humans would want to go back there, and John said, "Perhaps they want to eat the dinosaurs," and things developed from there.

FRANK: *One of the things that impressed me most about "Flesh" was that the dinosaurs were all contemporary for the Cretacious era, not the normal mixture for a dinosaur story.*

PAT: I'm very purist like that because I have to believe in the story. We didn't want tyrannosaurs with three claws, so we used good references. I think we occasionally used to check NEW SCIENTIST.

FRANK: *The amusing thing about the strip is Earl Reagan, the archetypal American hero in the big star hat who goes back into the past to collect the dinosaurs. At the time, Reagan wasn't even Governor of California any more, so why pick on him?*

PAT: That was pure coincidence, I don't

"NEMESIS started as an indulgent story."

think I'd ever heard of **Reagan** at the time. Sorry to disappoint you. I wanted a tough name and there was **Reagan** in THE SWEENEY (a British TV police show). He certainly was an awful American stereotype. Did he die in the end?

FRANK: *Chewed up by a dinosaur. Claw Carver survived.*

PAT: Oh yes, he was the one based on Lee **Marvin.**

FRANK: *Really?*

PAT: Well, in the past when you asked the artist to draw a hero they would draw a bland, blond wimp. So you'd have to say to base him on someone tough that the kids can relate to. We had to educate a lot of the traditional artists into a new way of thinking, drumming it into them every week: "make him contemporary." The fan artists didn't need it, they were ahead of us. **Kevin O'Neill** had all the contacts on the fandom side and he was able to put us in touch with people like **Dave Gibbons** and **Brian Bolland**, and because they had this background of reading American comics they didn't need to be told to do all the things I wanted to do to reflect current trends.

FRANK: *Then there was DAN DARE, who I always considered was the peg upon which 2000 A.D. was hung.*

PAT: That's not the case. I still weep for DAN DARE, but I was looking for anything to make the comic sell because science fiction hadn't got a very good track record before 2000 A.D. So DAN DARE made good commercial sense.

"Invasion" was also designed for sensational impact, and that made the front page of THE GUARDIAN. This guy rang me up and said "These Volgans, they're Russians, aren't they," and I said, "No, they're Volgans, they come from Volga." He said that Volga was in Russia and I said "Is it?" I didn't laugh, but he knew from the tone of my voice that I was killing myself laughing, really.

The original version of "Invasion" had **Angela Rippon**, and **Margaret Thatcher** being shot on the steps of St. Paul's Cathedral.

FRANK: *I'm all for that.*

PAT: I had no objection because it was all a fantasy, certainly an appealing fantasy as far as I was concerned, but at the last moment IPC lost their nerve and told us to tone it down and we weren't allowed to call the invaders Russians. A lot of people who wrote to the THE GUARDIAN objected anyway, saying that it was conditioning the kids into thinking we were going to have a Soviet invasion, and I thought it was just an adventure story and I could have easily made it an invasion by some right wing National front types. There have been some good stories written about Russian invasions, the classic one being, "When The Kissing Had To Stop." We wrote a reply to THE GUARDIAN and they didn't even bother to print it, which shows how liberal they are.

Robusters trapped in a world humans made. Art by Dave Gibbons.

FRANK: *I thought "Invasion" was spoilt by being so segmented.*

PAT: It was. I wrote episode one, and after that it was farmed out. The early 2000 A.D. is so bitty because it was farmed out to writers, many of whom were not very competent, and they were writing with me breathing down their necks and against their natural instincts. I had to breath down their necks, otherwise I would have ended up with another ACTION, with stories that were too violent to print, or a HOTSPUR type of comic with stories that were too boring to print.

Now 2000 A.D. has a much better flow about it because the writers and artists are much more in synch with each other.

FRANK: *As I recall you didn't contribute after the start of 2000 A.D. until "The Cursed Earth."*

PAT: There were a couple of things. I killed off MACH 1 for them and there was "The Visible Man." I was always fond of him and his problem.

FRANK: *He was soaked in chemicals that turned his skin transparent leaving his bodily organs visible. It struck me as a nice idea but a peculiar choice of continuing strip.*

PAT: That was one of the original ideas I had for 2000 A.D. I wrote about nine stories and that was one that the board thought was revolting and wasn't used, with two others. Like all the stories I write it had a point to it, in that he was just the same as everybody else.

FRANK: *Just transparent.*

PAT: Well, it had a purpose, something that let me get into his brain.

FRANK: *Soon after that you came up with RO-BUSTERS and CHARLEY'S WAR, two very contrasting strips. CHARLEY'S WAR certainly wasn't the traditional British gung-ho war story. It was realistic and set in World War One.*

PAT: That came about because it really gets up my nose the way that people slag off war comics. They're just a vehicle for drama like anything else. In CHARLEY'S WAR I set out to show that you can have a dramatic story that needn't make you feel sick at the same time. It needn't be glorifying war.

It was the first story where I actually set out to research things. Before CHARLEY "research" was a dirty word, and if you went out to buy a book you'd feel like a crook claiming expenses for it. The idea

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"By the end of CHARLEY'S WAR the

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This page: scenes from the gripping and realistic CHARLEY'S WAR written by Pat and drawn by Joe Colquhoun.

that you'd actually read up on a subject was alien, which wasn't surprising considering the stuff that had gone before. You don't need much research for "Sergeants Four."

There was a chain of stories that preceded CHARLEY. We started off by having German war heroes, which was unheard of in British comics, but went down very well. I thought the next step was to have a Japanese hero, but three things combined to prove me wrong there. Firstly, the Japanese mind is almost impossible for us to get into, then the guy who drew it didn't have the feeling for the Samurai. RONIN it wasn't. Thirdly, when the publishers got to hear of it they didn't want to know. Eventually, they only gave me eight weeks, waiting to see if there were any reactions from the British Legion or whatever. It worked okay, but the experience was so exhausting I thought that there had to be an easier way, something I could identify with that doesn't say the same old thing — the British equivalent of SGT ROCK, with an American soldier charging into machine-gun nests.

FRANK: *You've picked a bad example there. SGT ROCK is actually quite a sensitive strip. You're probably thinking of SGT FURY. Cigar, and legs never less than five feet apart.*

PAT: Well, the typical all-action hero. I thought, "What about World War One?." Right from the start of BATTLE we'd wanted to do a World War One story, and we'd always known it would have to be a kid who joined up underage, but the problem that beset us was how to do a World War One story when it was set in those dreary trenches the whole time. I realized that I couldn't get away with the usual slapdash action brew and sat down to think about the story in a way that I hadn't ever done before. That actually helped me a lot because I've applied those rules since.

When I knew I had the best possible artist in **Joe Colquhoun** I knew it was going to work, because he can make faces live in a way that other artists can't.

FRANK: *You experimented a lot with the storytelling in CHARLEY'S WAR. Stories were related through letters home and so forth.*

PAT: That technique of the letter writing came from an idea that I'd seen on ROMEO where **Estaban Maroto** had done this anti-war story in the Crimea told with a diary. The link with the handwriting made it very emotional. I wanted to bring this across in CHARLEY, but I don't think Joe was very comfortable with the idea. Once it became clear that the feature would run I had to adapt to the way that the artist was taking it, and that was one thing that changed. The other thing that changed as I got into the story was that my knowledge of World War One increased, and I didn't have to go in for such obvious metaphors as the flowers of the field.

Everything in the strip had to come from a real incident, because it's unfair to the survivors to make things up when you're dealing with a real battle.

FRANK: *Did you find any resistance to working that way?*

PAT: You mean censorship problems? By the end of CHARLEY'S WAR the level of censorship was crazy. They would censor things like Russian soldiers being sent

level of censorship was just crazy."

out into the snow naked. They would appear in the comic being sent out into the snow to die fully clothed. The idea of a back view of a nude soldier was apparently too much.

I'd set the story up so that it could continue into World War Two, but if that were going to happen it would have to be more contentious than anything I'd already written. For instance, after Dunkirk, soldiers were chucking their rifles out of railway carriage windows and saying that it was all over. You don't normally hear about that. The government thought that there would be much higher casualties during the blitz, so instead of having proper air raid shelters for people living in the East End slums they built up a great big supply of coffins. Those incidents are what CHARLEY'S WAR is all about. I'm not taking an anti-establishment view, just trying to show a different slant.

It takes a lot of research, sending away for specialist books and I needed help with the development costs from BATTLE, and if I found these contentious incidents I didn't want them scubbed out. Joe continued, and he was probably right to do so as his artwork can still be faithful to World War Two and he will carry on making a good job of it.

I took a lot of pleasure in keeping the strip running until 1919 and the British invasion of Russia, Britain's secret Vietnam, which was a nice thing to go out on. There were 20,000 British troops in Russia occupying the territory and it does help to explain attitudes to the West in Russia today, that and the fact that there was an American expeditionary force heading down the Siberian railway.

FRANK: *After the realism of CHARLEY'S WAR, RO-BUSTERS must have been a release.*

PAT: I would write CHARLEY for two weeks and live and breath the Great War and then do RO-BUSTERS for two weeks. RO-BUSTERS came about in a strange way. Somebody put me down for a strip in STARLORD that was bloody diabolical, and I didn't want to do it. It was about a bunch of retired soldiers, an upper class version of the A-Team with an ex-naval officer, an ex-RAF officer and so on, who had formed this squad to deal with disasters on planet Earth. I got rid of the officers and made them a bunch of robots. The main inspiration for the characters was The Muppets when they were really rude to their guests. Robots have the same potential as THE MUPPETS and it's never been exploited on TV. I loved the idea of a manic bunch of robots.

FRANK: *STARLORD was originally conceived as a monthly title and was switched to weekly publication at the last moment?*

PAT: That's right. If you're going to do a monthly story over 12 pages you can include a lot of characterization and humor as well as the disaster, but when it became a weekly everything was crammed into four pages and it became boring to have a disaster carried over so many episodes. I felt that I wanted to keep the characters and stuff the disaster. You could only have so many volcanoes erupting and planes crashing into skyscrapers. **Kevin O'Neill** designed all the characters and then **Pino** lost his grip on the story and was just throwing them away. I'm one of those unpleasant individuals who won't write the strip if I don't like the artwork.

FRANK: *In RO-BUSTERS you came up with two endearing and enduring characters in Ro-Jaws and Hammerstein. You're obviously fond of them because they recur in your stories. Why the names?*

PAT: There's obviously the musical connection, but I wanted names that rang together like **Laurel and Hardy**. The vague connection with SOUTH PACIFIC and so on was slightly surrealistic, slight-

The heroic, tragic ABC Warriors written by Pat and drawn by Dave Gibbons.

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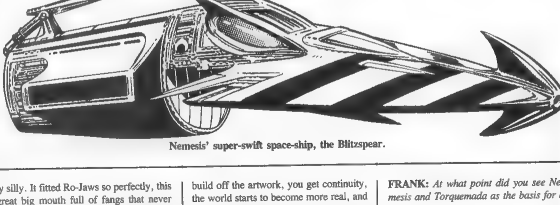
PAT MILLS

"I don't think the comics stories



Nemesis' super-swift space-ship, the Blitzspear.

© 1988 IPC

ly silly. It fitted Ro-Jaws so perfectly, this great big mouth full of fangs that never stopped yakking. I think there's a lot of me in him. He's got a mind like a sewer. Hammerstein is very straight and establishment.

FRANK: *The series changed very drastically when it moved into 2000 A.D. You did Hammerstein's war memoirs and then Ro-Jaws's memoirs adapted BLACK BEAUTY.*

PAT: That's right. It's an example of characterization going off its head. I had to lose the disaster stuff, and the memoirs were a search for new places for the characters to go. When I came to Hammerstein's war memoirs I realized that there was vast potential for a saga, which eventually became ABC WARRIORS

FRANK: *That's my favorite story of yours.*

PAT: Really? That's good! There was some editorial resistance when ABC WARRIORS was first put together. You've only got to look at the number of artists on it. The criticism at the time was that the kids wouldn't understand it. I don't think the comics I write are very complicated, but I use a wide spread of characters and comics tend to have a one-to-one basis which doesn't appeal to me. I just like the idea of characters bouncing off each other.

FRANK: *That's why teams seem to have taken over in American comics.*

PAT: At the time I had no idea that all these X-MEN and so on were so phenomenally popular. I had always thought that the ABC WARRIORS would do well with a two artist set-up. I was mortified when I ended up with a record number of artists on one story, and I don't know how it held together. I was very angry about it, and that's why it ended after 20 weeks.

FRANK: *I liked the fact that there were all these artists.*

PAT: So did I at the end of the day. There is something in it, but it wasn't deliberate. By the time that I got to the sixth or seventh artist I felt that I couldn't go on like that. If you have two artists on a series you can build off the artwork, you get continuity, the world starts to become more real, and you become involved in it. They're also spurring each other on. Because there wasn't that artistic continuity there wasn't that feedback.

FRANK: *NEMESIS with Kevin O'Neill started off with "Comic Rock," based on the Jam song. I always thought that was rather contrived.*

PAT: The theory behind "Comic Rock" was that it was to be like a rock video, a one-off story that wasn't subjected to the normal rules of the picture strip, hence "The Terror Tube," which was a really wacky story. If we had designed that as the premiere episode of a long-running serial we would have had to run umpteen more episodes around the terror tube in much the same way as Judge Dredd and the Mega-City, a hero in his world. We wanted a free ranging series of stories that could cover anything, and each would be wilder than the last, so instead of doing the terror tube next time we did "Killerwatt" which was a manic story about people flying up and down telephone wires. In recognition of the hero concept we planted Nemesis and Torquemada in it, but really it was again just a one-off story about a lunatic future.

After "Killerwatt" we thought we could top it with an even wackier story, and the result was "The Gothic Empire," a lunatic view of insane **Heath Robinson** machines, and once again the hero was planted as a secondary consideration. By that time it was obvious that we had a secondary consideration. By that time it was obvious that we had a serial rather than one-off stories that wouldn't tie Kevin down for the next three years. It's a tremendous commitment for an artist to produce five pages of story, week in, week out. We actually topped "The Gothic Empire" with a much stranger concept and rather than use that in Nemesis we put it on ice, and in a different form that's the graphic novel that Kevin and I collaborated on for DC comics.

FRANK: *At what point did you see Nemesis and Torquemada as the basis for a series?*

PAT: In "Terror Tube" we wanted a comic-book version of the film DUEL, and we knew that we had to have a hero and a villain for it to work in conventional terms and for 2000 A.D. to print it. By the time the second story came along the characters had begun to take over from the situation. We were becoming more interested in Torquemada and his college of Terminators than we were in our original concept, and be the time we got to "The Gothic Empire" that idea had completely taken over and we were thinking, "Who is this guy inside the Blitzspear? Why is he anti-Torquemada? And why does Torquemada say, 'be pure, be vigilant, behave, and cleanse all deviants?'"

FRANK: *Because They're great catchphrases?*

PAT: Subconciously, the answer was there all along. You can start a story and not know everything about your characters, finding out things as you go along.

FRANK: *"The Gothic Empire" is the most recent Nemesis story to appear, and has been drawn by Bryan Talbot, not Kevin. How come it's taken so long to see print?*

PAT: It's all part of the arse-about-face way that the story evolved. "The Gothic Empire" was a story about the Terminators invading this strange alien world that seemed to resemble Victorian London, and there were so many questions that had to be answered that it cried out for a prequel. What eventually happened was that we had three prequels leading into "The Gothic Empire." That will be followed by a final story.

FRANK: *Nemesis is a very oppressive strip . . .*

PAT: You mean depressing?

FRANK: *Oppressive and depressing and layered with all this religious symbolism. What do you think it says about you and Kevin?*

that I write are very complicated."

PAT: Originally, we had an ordinary police force charging up and down the terror tubes and somehow they looked out of place in this alien world. I've always found that the Ku Klux Klan visuals make for good villains, and I suggested the masks and hoods, and this in turn suggested the Spanish Inquisition. I think characters have a greater power if you draw on reality, and I recalled Torquemada being listed as one of the hundred most evil men that ever lived, and the name fitted. Once I went further into his character he developed, but I wouldn't say that he's a combination of all those types. If the religious one seems the strongest I would think that, having been taught by monks, I can draw on them. Monks are rather extreme characters by their nature, and that makes for a good story, but there's no particular axe I've got to grind.

I can write about the robes and ceremonies and all the rest of it with a certain conviction. Even one or two of my old teachers appear in a heavily-disguised form. One character in book one is described as "a prefect of discipline." They actually had such a title in the school that I went to and I thought at the time that it was an absurd title. This guy made a crusade of keeping us under control and would go in for elaborate things like handing out tickets for offenses, like a traffic warden. They would all have to be signed and countersigned, and this slavish attempt to control people underlies the way that the Terminators try to control everything.

I think Kevin was also taught by monks or nuns. With a name like **'Kevin O'Neill'** I'm sure that he must have been. Although he doesn't talk about it very much I think it all comes out in his artwork.

FRANK: *Despite the oppressive feel of NEMESIS as a whole, there are some episodes that you just seem to let loose with lunatic humour.*

PAT: "Nemesis" was started as an indulgent story, and that comes out from time to time even though I try to keep the action, because that's what the kids want. One of these days I'd like to write a story with no action at all that, really indulgent.

FRANK: *The Great Uncle Baal story fairly well qualifies under that description.*

PAT: That's a good example of a story with no action that was written and drawn with a great deal of enjoyment. Both Kevin and I were very happy with that and wanted to bring Great Uncle Baal back again and again, and we started fantasizing about all the bizarre things that he was going to get up to. To our great disappointment that episode bombed as far as the voters were concerned.

FRANK: *The infamous 2000 A.D. vote. I think you'd better explain that.*

PAT: It's an important thing that does affect 2000 A.D. Every week the readers can clip a coupon and vote for the story that they regard as best in the comic. They have a first, second and third choice and one for a story that they don't like. What this means is that if a story is popular it runs and runs, and if a story doesn't get good votes it's dumped. It's not down to the editor's opinion alone, he's invariably judging things by the votes. There is a theory that the people who vote are younger kids and they tend to vote for the action stories, and many of

Nemesis the Warlock. Drawn by Kevin O'Neill.

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It's Time

by Jan Strnad

Yep, you've dallied long enough. It's time for *you* to start picking up "one of the best titles around" (according to Martin Crookall of *Fantasy Advertiser*).

Dal's back in his own mini-series in the first offering from the new *Upshot Graphics* division of *Fantagraphics Books!* Here's what's in store for Dal fans, old and new, in the four-part series *Flesh & Bones*:

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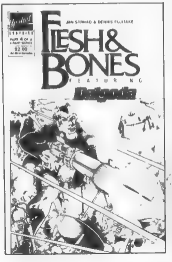

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"BATTLE had to be produced in secret."

© 1984 BBC

Dr. Who, the most popular time-traveler in the world, in another fix. Written by Pat and drawn by Dave Gibbons.

the older 2000 A.D. readers don't bother to vote. This can be reflected on things like NEMESIS, where during Book One and Two it was popular enough to continue, but when the Titan book came out it sold second only to JUDGE DREDD, and way out of step with the voting pattern. That suggests that there are two kinds of readers and if that silent older readership came forward more it would mean that you could have more adult stories in the comic. It's a frustrating thing. The best answer is to have a story that works on a number of levels and is popular with the old and the young, but of course it's very difficult to do that. The danger of putting something in for everybody is that you end up with a bloody mechanical story. Whichever way you go about it there are risks.

FRANK: *Well, how do you go about writing?*

PAT: It varies from story to story. To start with you have the whole process of evolving a character from scratch, and then you have the problem of writing it on a weekly basis. NEMESIS is a particularly weird example of creating a story from cold, and that's not the typical way that I would go about creating a strip.

I find a subject that I enjoy reading up on and that I want to write about. In the case of "Slaine" I'm really interested in pre-history and the Celts and their mythology, and therefore creating a character and serial that reflects this gives me the opportunity to go out and pursue my own reading hobby and get paid for it. I think the initial impetus is to have somebody else pay for my reading habit.

Then I think that it's got to have something to appeal to the readers and keep me in my habit, so I look for things that are going to suit the character and put those ingredients together.

I then start thinking about the character as such. I work out a complete character profile in my head, companions and what the story is going to be about and so forth and the story should evolve naturally from then on. The characters should give rise to a story once you have them and the situation.

You come to the second stage then, actually writing. What I would tend to do, these days at least, is to write the whole thing down in synopsis form and break it down episode by episode, so that I don't have to keep masses of thoughts in my head.

The nemesis of Nemesis, Torquemada. Drawn by Kevin O'Neill.

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FRANK: *Once you've worked out the synopsis does the writing come easily, or do you get writer's block?*

PAT: No, I don't, because if the story has been worked out properly you shouldn't have writer's block. The only problem that I have with writing is too many ideas, and the limitations of how many pages an artist can draw. If you look at the end of a Titan album you'll find that things suddenly speed up, and the reason for that is that the artist is running out of time and 2000 A.D. will appear without the character in if he doesn't deliver. I try for a mixture of strong story and strong action and to keep that on the boil is a lot harder to write than a really crass story which is all action. I could do that without any problem.

FRANK: *What about research?-You were saying before the tape was turned on that you don't read any comics. . . .*

PAT: I read a few just to keep in touch with what is going on and make sure that I'm not falling out of step with the current comics generation.

FRANK: *So I presume that you don't feel at all influenced by them?*

PAT: The best insurance against that is not to read other stories, just glance at them to see what's going on and leave it at that.

The same danger is there from novels. This never used to bother me when we were writing the early issues of 2000 A.D. because we had no idea how long it would last and nothing else mattered but to hit the market and keep in business. We would draw on any source we could, and not worry about the ethics of the stuff because we had no idea that it would be reprinted in Titan Books or Eagle Comics. "The Cursed Earth" is a good example. That was put to me as the DAMNATION ALLEY concept of getting from A to B, and I had no worries at all, but since then the general level of 2000 A.D. has risen and both

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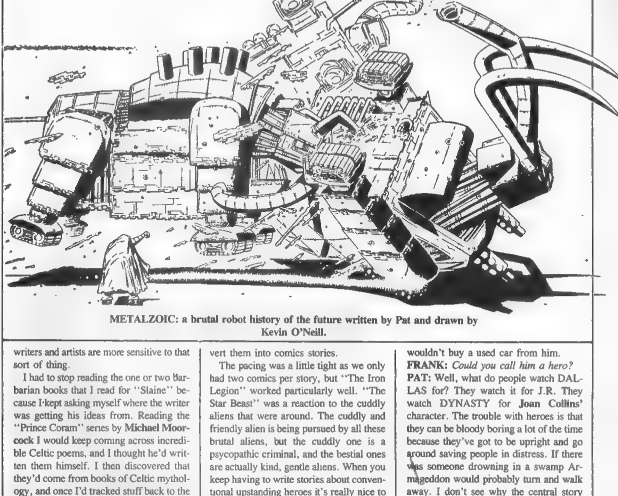
"Kids wanted impact, not originality."



METALZOIC: a brutal robot history of the future written by Pat and drawn by Kevin O'Neill.

© 1986 DC Comics

writers and artists are more sensitive to that sort of thing.

I had to stop reading the one or two Barbarian books that I read for "Slaine" because I kept asking myself where the writer was getting his ideas from. Reading the "Prince Coram" series by Michael Moorcock I would keep coming across incredible Celtic poems, and I thought he'd written them himself. I then discovered that they'd come from books of Celtic mythology, and once I'd tracked stuff back to the source I could discard the novels.

The whole subject of research is quite sensitive. On the one hand I like to credit my sources, but how much does an 11-year-old want to know? Mike McMahon summed it up perfectly when an American writer did a long screed about his sources for a story and Mike's comment on it was, "What he's really saying is 'I've done all this research, and by god you're going to know about it.'" With "Slaine" I struck a balance by doing a couple of features that covered some, but not all, of the material and we still got irate letters on things that we didn't acknowledge.

FRANK: *What about the DR. WHO stories that you and John wrote?*

PAT: John and I had a couple of ideas rejected by the BBC a couple of years back, and Dave Gibbons knew about them, so when he got the opportunity to draw DR. WHO he talked to us about these ideas we had on file and we were quite happy to convert them into comics stories.

The pacing was a little tight as we only had two comics per story, but "The Iron Legion" worked particularly well. "The Star Beast" was a reaction to the cuddly aliens that were around. The cuddly and friendly alien is being pursued by all these brutal aliens, but the cuddly one is a psycopathic criminal, and the bestial ones are actually kind, gentle aliens. When you keep having to write stories about conventional upstanding heroes it's really nice to do something that's enjoyably decadent.

FRANK: *You mentioned the graphic novel for DC comics earlier...*

PAT: Yes, with Kevin. The title is METALZOIC. I think the pages that Kevin has drawn are the wildest and most exciting thing that he's ever done. It's really mesmerizing, a very alien world, but still identifiable enough to make sense.

FRANK: *So what's the story about?*

PAT: It's about robot evolution, about a robot prehistoric area where everything in this world has become robotic, and a personal quest by the hero, or anti-hero, Armageddon, for the legendary God Beast, who's a giant robot mammoth. The story follows the search for the God-Beast and shows what happens when he finds him. Armageddon himself is the most unpleasant hero that we've ever done. Freed from the restrictions of 2000 A.D. he's a deliberately nasty piece of work, treacherous, unthinking, and unfeeling. You certainly wouldn't buy a used car from him.

FRANK: *Could you call him a hero?*

PAT: Well, what do people watch DALLAS for? They watch it for J.R. They watch DYNASTY for Joan Collins' character. The trouble with heroes is that they can be bloody boring a lot of the time because they've got to be upright and go around saving people in distress. If there was someone drowning in a swamp Armageddon would probably turn and walk away. I don't see why the central story character should be moral. I'm not saying that people should go out behave like Armageddon, but it makes for a far more interesting thing to write.

FRANK: *Who chose the format?*

PAT: DC asked which format we'd like to do it in. The graphic novel suits Kevin because it will bring out his color work to its best advantage, and it suits me because I can tell a story in a much better way, because it's like a film. It's difficult, because with 64 pages the pacing has to be right, but it's far more satisfying to write. I'm very pleased with it.

"The Marvel Universe is just too

ARCHIE GOODWIN

VITAL STATISTICS

Born: 8 September 1937. Kansas City, MO

Year You Came To NYC And Why: I came to New York City in January of 1956. It was because my parents wouldn't let me come in September of 1955. They insisted that no good would come of going to New York and going to art school. They said I should get a college education, so I went to the University of Oklahoma for three months and discreetly departed at Christmas vacation to avoid what would've been failing grades. I thereby escaped to New York by convincing my parents that rather than wasting the money they were spending to send me to college to flunk they could send me to art school to pass.

Favorite EC Comics: Harvey Kurtzman's FRONT LINE COMBAT, TWO- FISTED TALES and MAD, although I loved *all* the EC Comics.

Most Embarrassing Story You Wrote: Actually, the one I'm most embarrassed to have read back to me aloud would probably be HIS NAME IS SAVAGE. Fantagraphics reprinted it not too long ago and neither Gil Kane nor Fantagraphics has sent me a reprint check on that stuff. But I'm sure it's in the mail. *(Laughter.)*

Favorite Reproduction Process: Sex. And the neat thing is you can do it without reproducing too. *(Laughter.)*

Favorite Convention: I enjoy most conventions, often my favorites are small ones, often first conventions. I had a great time at conventions in Kansas City and Greensboro just because they were low-key and small scale.

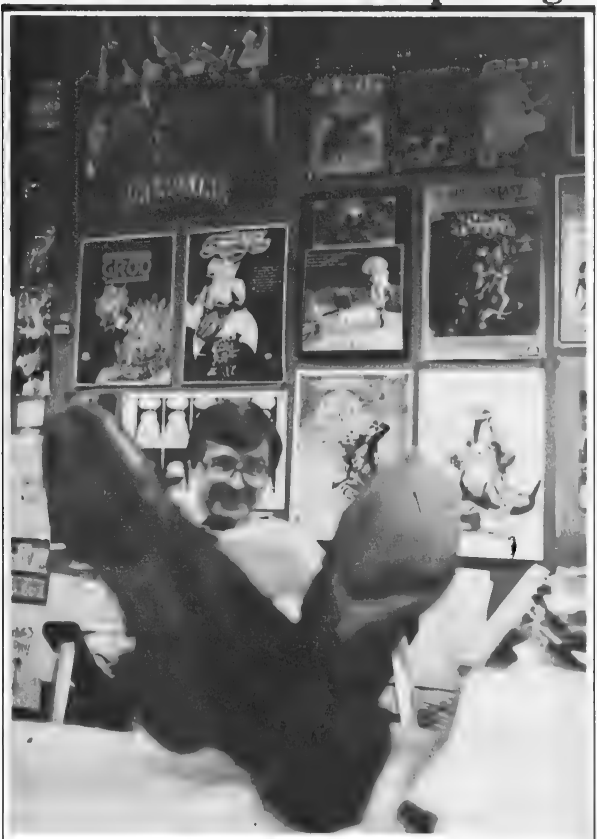
Best Unrecognized Comic Creator: Besides me? That's a tough one. Even if I could think of an answer, I wouldn't give it to you because, hopefully, I could exploit them before anyone else did.

Favorite Pro Wrestler: Nikita Koloff. If Sylvester Stallone truly wanted to stretch himself as an actor, this man would co-star in First Blood III.

Favorite Cuisine: Yuppie. Delicious either pan-fried, mesquite-grilled, or sliced thin and served raw with baby ears of corn and a dab of avocado.

Favorite Baseball Team: Baseball? With professional wrestling available, someone follows baseball?

vast and too all-encompassing."



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—Robert Bloch, author of Psycho

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— Isaac Asimov, author of I, Robot, Foundation, The Robots Of Dawn

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— Richard Levinson and William Link, creators of the television series, Columbo and co-creators of Murder, She Wrote

"Marc Bilgrey's Private Eye cartoons will make you split your gut."

— Gregory McDonald, author of the Fletch mystery novels (The basis for the recent film, starring Chevy Chase)

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— John D. MacDonald, author of the best seller, The Lonely Silver Rain, creator of the Travis McGee mystery novels

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Editor-in Chief of Warren Publications. Editor-in-Chief of Marvel Comics. Editor-in-Chief of Epic Comics. Writer of horror, science-fiction, adventure and super-hero stories. And now — creator of four of the eight debut titles in Marvel's New Universe.

Just who is this guy, Archie Goodwin, anyway — and why is he doing all this? It's a good question and one, unfortunately, I didn't ask him. But here's what I did ask him...

DWIGHT JON ZIMMERMAN: *The New Universe has been making a lot of headlines. How did you come to play such a major part in its creation — and what challenges did you face?*

ARCHIE GOODWIN: As with anything, it seems like it is never going as fast as it should be. We are doing eight titles, which will be monthly. No matter how much lead time you give yourself, it always turns out to be six months less lead time than you feel like you need. But aside from the deadline crunch, it's a tremendously exciting thing to be involved with. The idea of being involved in creating a whole line, as opposed to just one title, is exciting and fascinating. When we all got together to do these things, we were sort of — you start out with small expectations, because basically we wanted to stick to the fantastic adventure format that is one of the mainstays of comics. Then you start thinking, "My god, this has been done, that's been done..." It is so hard, in doing any kind of regular series, to come up with even a new villain — any new characters, in fact. So, I think when we first got together everyone was thinking that this was going to be a real uphill fight. What turned out was that everybody had ideas that they'd been churning around for years, sort've thinking: "Well, someday, if the situation is ever right, I could do this." That was certainly the case with me. I've never been the most prolific of writers, someone who has produced a huge volume of material. And yet I found out that when we started talking and throwing out ideas for the New Universe, that I had these things that — as I said — had been stewing underneath the surface that popped right out. **Jim Shooter** keeps saying of me: "Well, here's this guy, in one meeting, he suddenly spews out half the ideas for the New Universe." What that doesn't take into account is that for about five or six years I've had these half-formed notions and finally here is a situation where they would all fit in.

DWIGHT: *It really worked out well for you, creating four of the initial eight concepts used: MERC, PSI FORCE, NIGHTMASK and JUSTICE.*

ARCHIE: Exactly, but again, it wasn't like I just went into the meeting and suddenly four concepts sprang full-blown from my brow. These were all things that, one way or another, I'd been mulling around for years. Since the New Universe titles are starting out all on their own, a lot of these things I'd been considering wound up having a home, finally.

DWIGHT: *As I've come to understand it, the New Universe came about initially with Jim Shooter and Tom DeFalco creating the foundation for it and then you, Shooter, DeFalco, Mark Gruenwald, Eliot Brown and...*

ARCHIE: John Morelli.

DWIGHT: *John Morelli.*

ARCHIE: I'm trying to think if there was anyone else who was there... I think that was it.

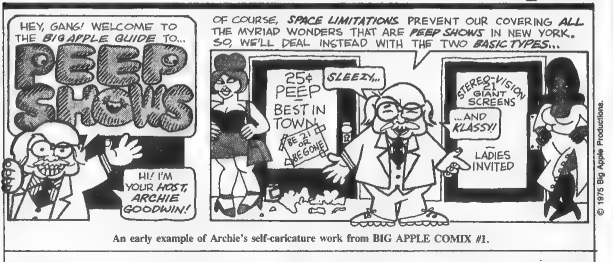
DWIGHT: *And then you guys all got together and started throwing out ideas that you had for everyone to discuss.*

ARCHIE: I think Jim had a basic over all idea. One, he wanted something closer to real life than what the regular Marvel Universe has become. Everything would proceed from this one event, this thing called the "White Event" which is an astronomical phenomena — a flash of white light that lasts 1.3 seconds. That's Mark Gruenwald's contribution. You'd expect someone who does The MARVEL UNIVERSE HANDBOOK would know to the microsecond how long something like this happens. This White Event is the starting point of the New Universe. I guess it would be comparable to a science-fiction novel which will extrapolate from one given event. Then, you try to proceed as realistically as possible from that given event. So with all the characters in the New Universe, whatever paranormal powers they have either come directly from the "White Event" or else are in some way linked with the "White Event."

DWIGHT: *The New Universe has been billed, amongst other things, as the 25th Anniversary tribute to the beginning of Marvel Comics.*

ARCHIE: Yes, and I think it's a brilliant concept. With every book you do, every line of comics you work for, you reach

Archie: "I looked down on super-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An early example of Archie's self-caricature work from BIG APPLE COMIX #1.

these points where every five years, every fifty issues, every hundred issues, it is time to do something special. Well, there have been so many big deals of one kind or another made that when something really big like the 25th Anniversary comes up, well, what do you do? Is the entire line a whole bunch of annuals that month? Is the entire line a whole bunch of Graphic Novels? Do you do one big coffee table book? All those ideas are fine. Marvel may even do some of those things, too. But, really, almost anything like that has already been done. So, this idea of a New Universe is remarkably special. No one has done that. To my knowledge, no one has just sat down and worked out a whole comics line in celebration of what they've accomplished with their main line. I think that this is very fitting. It is a way of acknowledging that the Marvel Universe has become so big and so all-inclusive that to just do a new title is not going to be that much of an event. The Marvel Universe is just too vast and too all-encompassing. To make any kind of impact we had to do something like this. That's why I find it a fascinating idea.

DWIGHT: *Considering the fact that everyone developing the New Universe was very deeply involved with the Marvel Universe, with the possible exception of yourself at Epic, how did you deal with the pressure to make sure you did not do a carbon-copy of the Marvel Universe?*

ARCHIE: This is something that we talked about amongst ourselves.

DWIGHT: *If a person who didn't know comics came up and asked, "What makes the New Universe different from the Marvel Universe?" what would you say?*

ARCHIE: I believe they wouldn't know that until they read them, frankly. The concepts are all good concepts but there is no reason why they couldn't be Marvelized. Yet our whole thrust was that we would try not to do that. The big thing that Jim harps on is "to explore the consequences of actions." In a regular super-hero comic, the sole thrust is usually towards the super hero having his adventure. Well, the main characters in the New Universe will have adventures, but those adventures will grow out of the consequences of their knowledge that they have suddenly gone from normality to having certain powers, and are suddenly being thrust into certain abnormal situations. And hopefully we will be exploring everything in a more real-life manner than the parameters of the Marvel Universe allow us. It's not that we're trying to say that, "Gee, the Marvel Universe is bad, so we are doing this whole new line." It's just that there are certain expec-

One of the New Universe titles that Archie created and is writing.

hero comics as being 'kids' comics."

tations of a Marvel comic — of a world where you have beings like Galactus existing. It is a little harder in such a Universe to then bring in a character with scaled-down powers, which in and of themselves — when explored more minutely — can be just as interesting, but lose impact in a place as mind-bogglingly cosmic as the current Marvel Universe. The New Universe is giving us a chance to take a closer, more realistic focus on the material.

DWIGHT: *With the New Universe, now Marvel has four different lines of comics: Marvel, Star, Epic and New Universe. That is a lot of different types of comics to be producing.*

ARCHIE: Well, one of the real exciting things about working in comics the last five or ten years is that the possibility of having a lot of different kinds of comics keeps opening up more and more. I think that the plain vanilla Marvel newsstand comic will always have an audience and will always be the sort of book that we will want to produce. But more and more as we go along, we discover that there are other areas that you can cover, slightly different ranges of readership that you can appeal to, than just your plain vanilla Marvel title.

DWIGHT: *Okay, when you talk of different readers, you've had a lot of experience that way by being the editorial director of Epic. Have you received any letters from readers who said, basically, that they were happy to see that a company like Marvel was printing the material that we see in Epic?*

ARCHIE: Sometimes, yes. A lot of the Epic letters will reflect that. Something like: "I'm glad to see that a company that does SPIDER-MAN can also do a comic like MOONSHADOW," or "I'm glad that a company that can do a book that can be as grim as, for instance, DAREDEVIL, can also do a GROO THE WANDERER." Yes, we get letters to that effect.

DWIGHT: *Speaking of MOONSHADOW, when it came out, it created a lot of controversy.*

ARCHIE: I think it was probably a smaller controversy than it seemed at the time.

DWIGHT: *Just a few vocal people who created a big stink?*

ARCHIE: No, I think. . . I think it was also our own fault. With books that have any kind of, you know, slightly off the mainstream subject matter, we usually try to give warning in our COMING ATTRACTIONS sheets which are sent out for wholesalers and retailers to use in making their orders. Some warning like: "Hey, this contains nudity, this is for mature readers." Things like that. Inadvertently, that got left out on the first issue of MOONSHADOW, so some people received the issue without a fair expectation of what they were going to get. Most people who got it, loved it. But the few who felt they weren't adequately warned were alarmed by the more graphic passages.

DWIGHT: *Were there any further complaints after that first issue?*

ARCHIE: No. Generally, MOONSHADOW is a book that quickly found its own audience. Those who read MOONSHADOW aren't surprised by anything that happens in it. People who might possibly be offended by what happens in it won't bother picking it up any more. Which is the way it should be.

DWIGHT: *Jim Starlin's DREADSTAR was the first comic Epic produced —*

ARCHIE: Why do you say it was a *first* comic? What is that strange reference? *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *Well, correct me if I'm wrong, but it was the debut title.*

ARCHIE: Yes, DREADSTAR was our first Epic comic. Now it's a First comics epic.

DWIGHT: *I could easily be wrong, but*

Archie developed this series which will be written by Steve Perry.

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HEY! THAT HURT.
YOU KNOW ALL ABOUT AMERICANS, KID? JUST HOW MANY HAVE YOU ACTUALLY MET, HUH?
ACTUALLY, UHM... TWO.
MAL'S FROM NEW ZEALAND.
ALL RIGHT. ONE
BUT I'VE READ A LOT! I KNOW AMERICAN POLICIES, HISTORY. I KNOW THAT YOU AND THE SOVIETS JUST WANT TO DESTROY EACH OTHER AND EVERYONE IN-BETWEEN.
NONSENSE. WE'RE ALL SWEETHEARTS.
NOW BE QUIET. I WANT TO HEAR IF MY MAKESHIFT LANDMINES SNUFF THE POSSE.
MERC

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Archie developed this series which is written by Peter David.

as far as I can remember, this is also the first time that a project has moved from a major publisher to one of the smaller ones.

ARCHIE: Well, our second Epic comic was COYOTE, which came from Eclipse to Epic. And I think we've seen alternative comic titles switch lines before.

DWIGHT: *What I was driving at is that Jim Starlin's move really underscores the fact that Epic produces creator-owned material.*

ARCHIE: Very definitely. One of the things with Marvel's creator-owned material is that the creators own it. If they become dissatisfied with anything or if they just feel like trying another publisher when their contract obligations are fulfilled, then they are perfectly free and able to make such a move.

DWIGHT: *Can you tell us why Starlin made his move?*

ARCHIE: Yes, he had dissatisfactions with some of our royalty reporting and some of our promotion.

DWIGHT: *You mentioned that COYOTE came from Eclipse. Is there a possibility that Epic will soon be publishing another series that got its start at another publisher?*

ARCHIE: There are no plans for it at the moment. On a number of occasions, I've spoken to people who worked for other publishers and been dissatisfied. We've explored the possibility of bringing their books to Epic. So far it hasn't happened yet.

DWIGHT: *You are "famous" in the Epic titles for your caricatures of yourself. You've been drawing yourself in little cartoons for quite a few years before Epic, though.*

ARCHIE: Well, of course, I started as a comics fan with the EC Comics. My first thought was, "Gee, I always liked drawing. I could get into comics as an artist." I came to New York City and went to art school. The writing came much easier and better for me than the art ever did. But, yeah, I can draw to a certain degree. And when we started doing the Epic comics it seemed like sort of a natural way of identifying the Epic comics by the **Archie Goodwin** editorials. Also, since Epic is a department, what I do as Editorial Director of Epic is, I tend to say "Yes" or "No" on the projects I see — but once I've said "Yes" or "No," I turn the accepted ones over to either my Managing Editor,

"The plain vanilla Marvel newsstand

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SR. CRAIG ONE

Archie *apres* Edgar in an early CREEPY Classic.

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Jo Duffy, or my Associate Editor, **Margaret Clark**. I divide my books among them. They function as the real editors in the way you have a Marvel editor functioning. They are the ones who go through the grief and the elation of working directly with the creators on the books. We've now got **Dan Chichester** as our Assistant Editor helping them and generally making their jobs a little easier. But they are the ones who do the day-to-day editing. Mostly, my concerns are the lofty picking and choosing of the projects. But to maintain an editorial identity for Epic and to give me a little work to do (laughter) I keep on doing the **Archie Goodwin** editorial drawings. That way I don't feel totally worthless after I've picked a project.

DWIGHT: *Right now I'd like to get some facts about Archie Goodwin, the writer. I first saw your name in Warren's CREEPY and EERIE.*

ARCHIE: That's pretty close to the beginning for me.

DWIGHT: *The thing that struck me most was, not only were you the Editor-in-Chief, but you also seemed to have written every story published in the magazines for a while.*

ARCHIE: Not quite every single story, but close enough.

DWIGHT: *Your name was very prominent, to say the least.*

ARCHIE: Well, actually, my salary at Warren was predicated on writing about 80-90% of the material. When CREEPY and EERIE started out, I wasn't the first editor — there was another editor before me who had a falling out with the publisher.

DWIGHT: *Russ Jones?*

ARCHIE: Yeah, Russ was the first editor. I guess from the beginning I had been contributing from 50-75% of the stories when Russ was editing CREEPY. I had worked with most of the artists who where drawing for the book. They knew me and trusted me, so when **Jim Warren** and **Russ Jones** came to a parting of the ways, I was a logical person to step in and do it. I had worked at REDBOOK magazine. So I had editorial experience as well as writing experience. Since I was writing most of the material, I was able to tailor scripts to the particular needs and desires of the people contributing. That worked in my favor, too. So when **Warren** and I struck our deal, we based my getting a weekly salary on editorial contributions plus my writing.

DWIGHT: *In some respects, the early issues of CREEPY and EERIE were the comic magazine versions of the classic pulp magazine, WEIRD TALES. So many of the really famous artists contributed to the Warren publications.*

ARCHIE: Well, at the time **Warren**

comic will always have an audience."

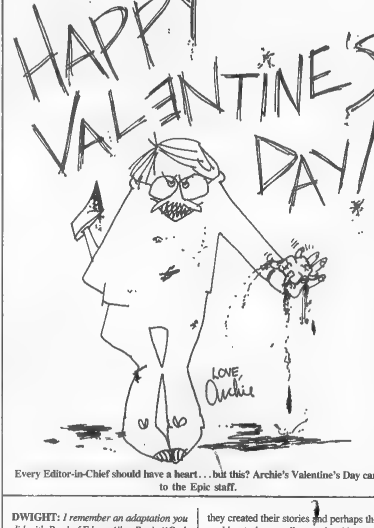
started CREEPY, comics were just beginning to come out of a ten-year-long drought from the mid-'50s when there was all the focus on comic books being a contributing factor to juvenile delinquency. A lot of companies had gone out of business. Comics were in a real doldrum situation. When **Warren** started his magazines, the industry was just starting to come out of that. DC, through the **Julie Schwartz** books, had rediscovered the super hero. Marvel Comics were just starting to get rolling with their super heroes. But it was still possible for a lot of the artists associated with EC — people like **Al Williamson**, **Frank Frazetta** and **Reed Crandall** and **Angelo Torres** and **Gray Morrow**, **Joe Orlando**, **Alex Toth** — a lot of these people were not fully committed in terms of their work loads. Had **Warren** decided to start his line, say, a year or a year-and-a-half later, he would have had trouble trying to find artists, let alone artists of the caliber he was able to get.

DWIGHT: *Dealing with as many different artists as you did during that period, did you find yourself adapting your writing style to each particular artist?*

ARCHIE: My feeling at that time was that writing in comics should be a little like good background music in movies. It makes a contribution that works toward the success of the overall piece, but you shouldn't specifically notice it. If suddenly the reader is aware and says, "Hey, this is great writing!" then you're maybe calling more attention to it than you should. What the reader should be thinking is: "Wow this is a great story." and not be conscious of the writing for the writing's sake. As far as writing style goes, I didn't particularly change my writing from story to story. What I would try to do is vary the subject matter to the particular artist. Before I did a script I would talk to the artist and ask him what kind of story he wanted to do. A historical period, a type of story, a setting he'd like to work in, anything like that would give me a springboard toward narrowing my own thinking and coming up with something to please us both.

DWIGHT: *Did any of the artists have any consistent preference?*

ARCHIE: Well, some liked doing something different everytime. Others were like **Reed Crandall**. He was just a master of the **Henry Pitz** and the **Gibson** style of cross-hatching, single-hatching type rendering. I usually found that rendering worked well in a historical story, plus Reed seemed to enjoy doing different historical periods. So I would usually give him something other than a contemporary setting.



Every Editor-in-Chief should have a heart... but this? Archie's Valentine's Day card to the Epic staff.

DWIGHT: *I remember an adaptation you did with Reed of Edgar Allen Poe's "Cask of Amontillado," with the trademark Warren twist ending.*

ARCHIE: Yeah, I did adaptations of some of **Bram Stoker**'s stuff, some of **Ambrose Bierce**'s material and some of **Poe**'s. I called them CREEPY Classics or EERIE Classics What that meant was that this was material in the public domain and that we didn't have to pay for doing adaptations of it. *(Laughter.)* But since it was public domain, I felt that it was also very familiar material. So for the first year that I did these things, I felt obligated to give them either new endings or new beginnings — flesh them out in some way so readers who were totally familiar with he stories were still getting a little something more than this completely familiar material. Later on, I began to realize that maybe **Edgar Allen Poe** and the others knew what they were doing when they created their stories and perhaps they could get along well enough without my help. So I laid off doing that. But even when I'd add stuff, I'd generally try not to muck up the original story. If I could, either through a prologue or an epilogue, I'd add a new twist on what had already been done. I don't think on any of them I actually went in and changed what the original author had done. I just added at the beginning or at the end, until I came to my senses.

DWIGHT: *Did you follow what was happening in the other companies, particularly Marvel, during this time?*

ARCHIE: As a bit of a preamble to that, I got into comics as an EC fan. EC did war, science fiction, horror comics... if you were an EC fan you tended to look down on other types of comics. I particularly looked down on super-hero comics as being "kids' comics." Even when I was do-

"I pulled Epic out from under Al Milgrom."

ing the Warren material, I maintained this sort of "holier-than-thou" attitude that I was working in the more adult vein and that people who were interested in super heroes were certainly more immature than me.

DWIGHT: *This was while you were adapting Poe and Bierce...*

ARCHIE: And changing them, yes! But then... as I realized more and more people were working for Marvel and getting excited about working for Marvel, I finally decided that as a professional, I had to see what these things were. I started picking them up. The first on, I picked up was the issue of STRANGE TALES that first featured NICK FURY, AGENT OF S.H.I.E.L.D. with DOCTOR STRANGE sharing the comic. The second one, I think, was a FANTASTIC FOUR. And I found..."Well, yeah, they're super heroes, but they're a lot of fun, too." So I began casually reading one or two, then casually reading about eight or ten of them. I really got hooked and began buying them all the time. So even when I was working at Warren, I was buying and saving the Marvel comics and enjoying them.

DWIGHT: *Didn't you get strange looks from the newsstand vendors? After all, comics had a big juvenile stigma then.*

ARCHIE: Well, I'd usually hide my comics inside issues of HUSTLER or CYCLE SLUTS or something like that. *(Laughter.)* No, I didn't worry about that too much.

DWIGHT: *Since some of the artists working for Marvel — like John Severin and Steve Ditko — also did work for Warren, did you get into any discussions with them about what Marvel was doing?*

ARCHIE: To a certain extent. I first started on that with **Wally Wood**, who had worked with Marvel for a while, then was working for Warren for a while. Through Woody — by that time he was also doing T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS and people like **Bill Pearson**, **Roger Brand**, **Larry Ivie** and others were working with him —

I remember hearing that **Steve Ditko** was going to be leaving SPIDER-MAN. So I approached **Ditko** about doing stuff for Warren after he left Marvel. I was following their books enough to like and appreciate **Ditko**'s work and be anxious to get him to do work for us when I had heard that he would be leaving. Also, I was working with **Gene Colan** who was penciling under the name **Gary Michaels**...

DWIGHT: *He also used Adam Austin.*

ARCHIE: I'm sorry, **Adam Austin**. **Gary Michaels** was **Jack Abel**. Ah, how quickly we forget.

DWIGHT: *Yes, that was the period in comics where we saw such names as Mickey Demeo (Mike Esposito) and —*

ARCHIE: Yes, anyone who worked regularly for DC also had a Marvel pseudonym. But I remember that **Gene Colan** would be very excited about the stuff he was doing for Marvel. So definitely there was beginning to be a cross interest.

DWIGHT: *Then you left Warren for Marvel. What was your first Marvel piece?*

ARCHIE: The first thing I may have worked on was a Sub-Mariner story from when the Sub-Mariner and the Hulk shared the TALES TO ASTONISH book. I think that was my first actual Marvel assignment. But the way it came about was that I had met **Roy Thomas** socially. And Roy said to me that Marvel was beginning to look for more writers and if I ever decided to leave Warren, I should give him a call. So when I decided to leave Warren, I called Roy and he set up an appointment with **Stan Lee**. At that time, the way you got a writing job at Marvel was that you went up and they gave you three or four penciled pages of art and you dialogued those as a test. So I went to visit Stan and he was busy working on an Iron Man job at the time. He had — I don't think they even had Xeroxes then — I think he had photostats made of pages he was still writing. So he gave me four photostated Iron Man pages. I took those home, wrote them and brought them in. He liked what he saw and said, "Okay, you're writing Iron Man now." I assume if he had been working on SGT. FURY, I'd have been writing SGT. FURY. Thank God he wasn't writing MILLIE THE MODEL when I walked in. I think Roy and **Denny O'Neil**, who worked there before me, weren't quite that lucky. They had to serve an apprenticeship period on MILLIE THE MODEL. But by the time I got there they were anxious enough to get new writers that they immediately gave me Iron Man, which was then eleven pages in TALES OF

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Top and above: PSI Force in action.

"CEREBUS is satire? I've been misreading it."

Justice stalks the streets...

© 1986 MCS

SUSPENSE. I told them I could use about twenty pages of writing a month, so they also gave me the Sub-Mariner to write.

DWIGHT: *One of your most challenging periods must have been coming in as writer on NICK FURY, AGENT OF S.H.I.E.L.D. after Jim Steranko had left.*

ARCHIE: No, that wasn't so much of a challenge, because the way it was presented to me was that **Steranko** was coming back, so all I had to do was a fill-in issue. I think Roy had plotted a job with **Frank Springer** and I wrote that one. Then they said, "Well, Jim is taking a little longer, write another one." And so on. So it wasn't a challenge because each one was a fill-in issue. After about six months it became sort of embarrassing. If it was a challenge, I feel like I failed it utterly, but I didn't approach it as a challenge, I approached it as a temporary job — vamping until the real writer/artist was ready.

DWIGHT: *How long did you work at Marvel that first time?*

ARCHIE: Probably not much over two years. Maybe a little bit longer than that. I stayed at Marvel long enough for IRON MAN to become its own book. It might have been three years, because I worked on IRON MAN up to about issue #26. Then I went back to Warren for a while. Then I went back to Marvel for a while. Somewhere in there **Carmine Infantino** called me up and said that **Joe Kubert** was giving up some of the war books he was doing over at DC. Carmine had liked the BLAZING COMBAT magazine I had done for Warren and asked me if I'd be interested in editing DC's war books. I've always been a "grass is always greener on the other side" kind of guy, so I usually will jump into a new situation rather than maintain the status quo. I went over to DC and worked there for about a year and a half doing their war books. While I was there, Carmine also gave me DETECTIVE COMICS to edit. Through DETECTIVE COMICS I wound up doing Manhunter with **Walt Simonson**.

DWIGHT: *That was a good series.*

ARCHIE: I consider the BLAZING COMBAT material that I did for Warren and the MANHUNTER material I did with **Walt Simonson** for DC as well as some of the STAR WARS material I did with **Al Williamson** to be about the best things I've done in comics.

DWIGHT: *You kept rising editorially until you became Editor-in-Chief of Marvel.*

ARCHIE: Well, once I got through about

...and delivers his own brand of Justice.

"Jim Shooter has always had this feeling

This page and the next: a Dave-Sim's-eye-view of Jim Shooter and Archie Goodwin? From CEREBUS #82.

my first year, year and a half in comics, I became acutely self-conscious about my writing to the point that I began producing less and less of it. So I've always flitted back and forth between being an editor and being a writer. I'll edit for a while and then go freelance and then discover that as much fun as freelance life is, I can't make enough of a living, so I'll jump back into editing. So yeah, I've had my hand in both.

DWIGHT: *Can you tell us how Epic Comics was created?*

ARCHIE: I had been editing and writing the STAR WARS comic book on a freelance basis for Marvel when **Jim Shooter** called me to see if I'd be interested in doing EPIC ILLUSTRATED. Like I said; I'm usually ready to jump into a new situation. When EPIC ILLUSTRATED proved to be enough of a success, it gave Marvel courage to think about doing more creator-owned material. Epic Comics was the next logical spin-off. Jim came to me and said, "Hey, I've got a great idea. I know you're using every working minute of your life on EPIC ILLUSTRATED, but what do you think about Epic Comics?" And I sort of slumped into my seat and said, "Welllll . . ." And Jim took this as a "No," not realizing that my general reaction is that when first presented with anything, I usually see all the downside, how much work it's all going to be. This doesn't necessarily mean I don't want to do it. Anyway, Jim, not unnaturally, interpreted my lack of jumping-on-top-of-the-desk enthusiasm as a "no" and then went to **Al Milgrom** and said, "Look, **Jim Starlin** would like to do his own comic book. We've come up with this idea of doing it — since we've already got EPIC ILLUSTRATED using creator-owned material — we'd like to do a new line of creator-owned comics and call them Epic Comics." When this started to become an actuality, I went to Jim and said, "Look, I'm editor of EPIC ILLUSTRATED. If you're going to do something called Epic Comics that's trading off that name, I'd hate to see it happening without me being involved." And Jim said, "Oh, goe, I didn't think you were interested." Then he went to Alan and said, "Hey, that crazy **Archie Goodwin** really is interested. Would you mind stepping down?" And Al, great guy that he is, said that he wouldn't mind. So that's more-or-less how Epic Comics started.

DWIGHT: *And you've not been on speaking terms with Al since. (Laughter.)*

ARCHIE: Strangely enough, we still are. Al has never given me any grief about it. But I did sort of pull the Epic line of comics out from under Al. Really I guess it came to be because **Starlin** wanted to do

© 1985 Dave Sim

that Marvel can publish anything."

© 1986 Dave Sim

his own comic. In fact, I think originally the way that started out was **Starlin** and **Frank Miller** and **Walt Simonson** all had individual projects they were thinking about doing. They approached **Shooter** with the idea of doing some other kind of magazine, maybe like EPIC ILLUSTRATED, but that would have all three of them each doing their individual projects. Frank's project, I think, was what eventually became RONIN, which he wound up going to DC with. **Starlin's** was, of course, DREADSTAR, which he wound up turning into an Epic comic. Walt's was probably STARSLAMMERS, which he eventually did as a Graphic Novel.

DWIGHT: *With the Epic line of comics, initially everybody must have been kind of feeling out the new creator-owned situation. Did you feel you had more freedom of choice in setting the organization up?*

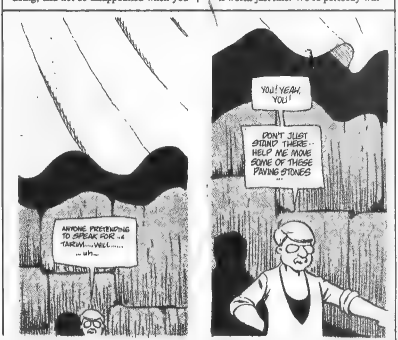
ARCHIE: At that time, everyone was really getting heady on the success of direct sales. No one knew what the limits of the direct sales market were. Retailers, wholesalers, publishers — I don't think anybody really knew what limitations there might be on it. There was a real spirit of "anything goes." For a couple of years, that was true. As a result, each month there would be a new publisher and even more comics aimed for this market. I think now we're beginning to find more limitations of the field, more the idea that you have to be a little careful. If you do one type of thing you had better make sure that it is in a package that is right for the audience that you are going to reach. We are still experimenting and exploring. I think we haven't seen the end of different sizes and prices in the packaging of comics.

DWIGHT: *What have been the biggest pitfalls that you've experienced in your career as editor?*

ARCHIE: Oh, god! *(Laughter.)* I guess the biggest pitfall, as far as I'm concerned, is still deadlines. They are inevitably the biggest pitfalls. It is always a fight against deadlines, particularly in creator-owned comics where often the success of a comic will rise or fall on how well it meets its deadlines. I think, to this, day too often creators will come into it thinking that, "Hey, this is my own book, I can do anything I want." Well, yes, you can, but you still have to be a regular presence on the newsstand or in the store. If you miss shipping, then your book has to be reordered. If a retailer or a wholesaler has to reorder a book he or she may think, "Gee, he didn't make it that time, I've got all these disappointed customers. I'm knocking down my order." It can affect whether a book lives or dies.

DWIGHT: *Any advice you might be able to pass on to any alternative publisher?*

ARCHIE: Not anything they wouldn't have already found out themselves by now. If anything, it seems to me that what everybody has to realize is that all audiences aren't equal. You can do a book that will reach a broad spectrum of readers, or you can do a book that will reach a smaller, select audience. You have to realize when you do a book, what kind of book you're doing, and not be disappointed when you obviously do something with limited appeal. You should not be shattered when you find it doesn't sell as well as SPIDER-MAN or something like that. Take CEREBUS. It's a popular book in its own range. And yet this is a black-and-white book that costs just as much as many full-color, slick-paper, camera-separated comics. But for the readership that follows CEREBUS — and I'm one of those readers — it works just fine. We're perfectly will-



"It's hard to come up with new characters."

ing to shell out a buck seventy-five or a buck ninety-five, whatever it is, for the CEREBUS experience.

DWIGHT: *I follow CEREBUS myself. Now, do you read each issue as it comes out or do you save up a batch and then read them all at once?*

ARCHIE: The biggest trouble I find in being an editor and writer in comics is that, to a certain extent, it spoils comics for me. But there are still some comics that I enjoy reading. They tend not to be most regular comics, probably because I'm so jaded. But generally, with a book like CEREBUS, I read it as it comes out. A few titles I'll save up. However, I have to be careful because if I save up something too long, I may never get around to reading it. So I generally read stuff as it appears.

DWIGHT: *Dave Sim has shot some pretty biting satirical barbs at people in CEREBUS —*

ARCHIE: Really? CEREBUS is satire? Oh my god! I've been misreading it! *(Laughter.)* The next thing you're probably going to tell me is that he's really an aardvark, that it isn't just a nickname like Conan the Destroyer.

DWIGHT: *Dave Sim has caricatured a lot of people and a lot of concepts in his series. And recently you were featured, as well.*

ARCHIE: Aw, nooo! Yeah, I suppose so. I guess that could have been me. Well, you know, if you like satire, you've got to be prepared to like it if it's directed against you, too. It is easy enough to laugh when it's directed at someone else.

DWIGHT: *What other alternatives do you read?*

ARCHIE: Well, I have to give this answer a little bit of qualification. Obviously I like most of the Epic comics that we do.

DWIGHT: *Not all — just* most*?*

ARCHIE: Um, I like *all* the Epic comics that we do. That's a little like family. With family there are days when you have good children and there are days when you have bad children. So that may affect how I feel about some of our own titles. Anyway, before I name alternatives I like, I also have to say that there are many Marvel comics I like and many Epic comics I like as well, and I'm too friendly and closely involved with most of the people producing them to ever put myself in the position of picking favorites there. Among the alternatives currently there is CEREBUS, of course, and I've been enjoying MIRACLE MAN by **Alan Moore** and **Alan Davis** and diverse hands that have followed **Alan Davis**. AMERICAN FLAGG when **Chaykin** was doing it. JON SABLE. Oh god, once you start this it's awful — I always knew there was a reason why I'd hedge when anyone asked me to name what I like, because inevitably I always forget some. I like LOVE AND ROCKETS. I've enjoyed DALGODA, as long as I'm plugging Fantagraphic's books. What others? MS. TREE — I'm a mystery and suspense buff, so I enjoy almost any sort of private eye stuff. I'm sure there are probably a lot more.

Nightmask becomes a nightmare.

DWIGHT: *Two of the big things people are talking about now that are coming out of Epic are, first, Frank Miller's ELEKTRA and also —*

ARCHIE: Let's call it ELEKTRA: ASSASSIN so that we don't confuse it with **Frank Miller's** ELEKTRA or **Frank Miller** and **Bill Sienkiewicz's**

For Nightmask, all his adventures are a dream.

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"I'd hide my comics inside HUSTLER."

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DAREDEVIL/KINGPIN Graphic Novel.

DWIGHT: *Okay. And Alan Weiss' STEELGRIP STARKEY.*

ARCHIE: Right. Well, those are our two newest books. So hopefully people are talking about them.

DWIGHT: *Well, STEELGRIP STARKEY has had a rather lengthy gestation period.*

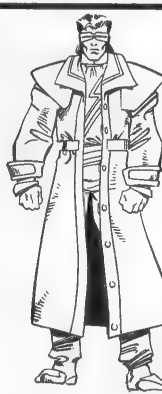
ARCHIE: That is probably one of the nice things about the fact that they have done it as an Epic comic. Alan and **Jim Sherman**, who is working with him on the series, are incredibly original and talented gentlemen. They have other commitments outside of comics. They can be slow producing their work. But one of the advantages of having it be a Marvel/Epic project is that we can afford to give them a long gestation period, knowing that ultimately it will be worthwhile. We had problems with the COYOTE book early on, where **Steve Leialoha** left as the artist and it took a long time finding a replacement for him. That murdered the book schedule-wise and despite heroic efforts by **Steve Englehart**, COYOTE never quite recovered. It was the same with VOID INDIGO, where we had scheduling problems that ultimately led to us cancelling the book. Since then, we've gotten a lot more leary about bringing a book out before we have a number of issues in the drawer, as we built up with STEELGRIP, by waiting all this time.

DWIGHT: *You mentioned having problems not finding an artist for COYOTE. With Epic, a writer and an artist must have to approach you together with a project.*

ARCHIE: Very much so. As long as it is a creator-owned project what we are generally looking for is a creator-owned package. You can bring people together. But what you are talking about, basically, is a marriage. And god knows, even people who have supposedly gotten married before they came to us have then gone through the throes of "divorce." When two creators come to me, I want them to agree to work together. Too often it has led to feuding between people. So now, whenever two or more individuals are involved, I want them to really be set and secure about working together before we agree to do their project with them.

DWIGHT: *On ELEKTRA: ASSASSIN, both Frank Miller and Bill Sienkiewicz are doing something radically different.*

ARCHIE: Well, I think they're doing really breakthrough material. In terms of both the writing and the artwork. The fact that this is a full camera-separated comic book, you know, every panel a painting, gives Bill an opportunity to play to all of his strengths, which are considerable. He is doing



Justice. Watch out for him!

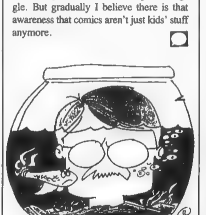
remarkably sophisticated work, and Frank, who is working full script, is giving Bill situations and characters — especially characters! — to really dig into. Still, I get a little bit apprehensive when people begin saying that this is radically different. I feel when word spreads with this "new stuff" sort of slant that it creates the impression that the material is inaccessible. It is not inaccessible material. Anyone can follow it, but it is material with a very strong point of view. It is not material meant to be read by, say, younger readers of DAREDEVIL. That's why it's appearing as an Epic book. Particularly, it is very introspective material in the way that it looks into untold aspects of Elektra's life and examines some of the characters. It tells the story from their perspectives; it includes their psychological feelings at those individual moments in the story. This affects what they see and how they see it. And that becomes part of the story.

DWIGHT: *Marvel has really done more experimenting with formats and types of stories than some people give credit for.*

ARCHIE: Yes. I think this is **Jim Shooter's** influence. Not just on Epic but the whole Marvel line. Jim has always had this feeling that we can publish anything. If you want Marvel to publish something, and Marvel agrees to publish it, we'll find a way of marketing the package. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. But that has been the philosophy.

DWIGHT: *How much has readership changed over the decades?*

ARCHIE: I don't know really how much it's changed. With the direct sales market more people who might be interested in comics now have outlets where they can find them and find more variety to choose from. In the 1960s there were underground comix and there were regular comics. I think there were various tries even then where people would attempt something half-way in between. But the distribution channels weren't quite right. Now, finally, they are. Or at least they're certainly much better. Anyway, as I was saying, I don't know how much the readership has actually changed, but I think the possibility of that readership actually finding comics to interest them has changed. That's led to something of a broadening in readership. Also, a lot of the people who got into comics in the Sixties now have offspring and *they* are getting into comics with parental encouragement rather than resistance. And also, always before in comics there'd be a boom period and then a bust period. Well, we've had minor declines and major ascendencies in the last twenty-five years but basically comics haven't gone away or, like, totally regeared. So I think now you get more readers with higher expectations for comics other than being something to entertain them for twenty or thirty minutes. That entertainment is still the function of your mainstream comic. And that is not be underestimated, either. Still, comics have now been around and acceptable for a long enough period of time that people are slowly getting used to the idea that "Well, hey, this isn't entirely a kids' medium." As a result there is a chance for a little more variety in comics. And as we go along I think that will grow and build. It is always a kind of slow, uphill struggle. But gradually I believe there is that awareness that comics aren't just kids' stuff anymore.



"I kiss Dick Giordano on the mouth

A self-portrait in oil.

My family kept busy in the kitchen, preparing the dinner to be, as I set up taping equipment in my office, all of us waiting for the would-be bad-boy-of-comics, Joe "Did-I-slip-up-and-tell-the-truth-again?" Rubinstein. Preparing for this kind of interview — one where the subject's reputation for brashness, insensitivity and slander are long standing — can be dicey. There is on one hand a feeling of "go-easy," balanced on the other hand by a sense of "prod-for-the-sore-spots."

Joe arrived on time (one myth shattered), and proceeded to take the 50¢ tour of the house and have dinner. He was friendly and congenial through both (two more bad marks stricken). Moving over to the office for the taping, the ogre I was warned about was given ample opportunities to spring forth, but he never showed. There was the normal sense of caution one finds in most interviews, along with free admissions to a caustic nature — but it was an informative conversation with one of Marvel's top talents who is, without exaggeration, one of the finest inkers in the business...

CHRIS HENDERSON: *Joe is reaching for a comic book. It's not a Marvel, it's DALGODA!*

JOE RUBINSTEIN: Very good artwork, **Kevin Nowlan** is great.

CHRIS: *Hear that, Jim Shooter, he didn't reach for a Marvel. Joe, let's go back before you were at Marvel, and talk about the early days at Continuity. Any stories you want to verify, get rid of, or just plain tell for the first time?*

JOE: The stories about Continuity have been repeated so many times I'm sure everybody knows them. I started to work at Continuity when I was thirteen years old, as **Neal Adams** and **Dick Giordano's** assistant, just generally doing slave labor.

CHRIS: *Just emptying the trash?*

JOE: If it were only that clean of a job, yeah. As a matter of fact, the studio was so small — it was three rooms that we were renting from another studio — that whenever a client showed up, I had to leave the room and go to the library because there was no room otherwise. This was back at 9 East 48th Street. So there I was at thirteen, and it was a very high pressure place to be, especially for someone who had never had anything to do with a grown-up world — you had to grow up real fast. Lots

every time I see him . . . it's a lot of fun."

JOE RUBINSTEIN

of people went through that place. Some really good artists, as it turned out. I've got to say, for the record, that **Dick Giordano** taught everybody everything they know. Dick sort of balanced out the malevolent evil that was present in the studio at all times, and to this day, and I'll admit it in print — I kiss **Dick Giordano** on the mouth every time I see him, because — because it's kind of a lot of fun, actually. *(Laughter.)*

CHRIS: *Good a reason as any.*

JOE: Because it's like this — Dick taught me how to ink, and what do you know, I was able to move out of my parents house, and make a nice living and all that stuff. **Dick Giordano** is probably the best inker around. He himself has said that he is working at 70% of his capacity, as far as quality goes. It seems that everybody in the business wanted to be **Dick Giordano**, and from him sprang forth **Klaus Janson**, and **Terry Austin**, and me, and recently **Mike De Carlo** and **Bill Collins**. And now everybody wants to be **Terry Austin** because Terry does the big lead books, and nobody looks at Dick's stuff anymore. Dick was the guy who held Continuity together — he was the cement of the place. I think probably the best inkers in the business are working at DC, with the exception of **Palmer**, **Sinnott**, **Ordway** (although he bounces) and a few others, because everybody wants to work for Dick because he's such a nice guy. Going back to Continuity — what can I say that won't get me sued?

CHRIS: *You're the only one who knows! How long were you there?*

JOE: I started at thirteen and worked there for a summer, and then I didn't come back for nine months. Then I came back and started to do just general garbage work, and there I met the legends — **Wally Wood** — he rented space there and I became his assistant for a little while; **Russ Heath**, **Jack Abel**, and **Bob McLeod**. Then I met **Mike Nasser** when I was seventeen years old, and Mike had just gotten his first comic-book job, and I asked him if I could practice inking on Xeroxes of his pencils, and he said "Go ahead, ink a page," so I did, and he showed it to **Gerry Conway**, his editor at the time, and Gerry gave me my first job when I was seventeen. Up until that point, I was never used at the studio to do artwork. It was just general garbage, delivering and stuff. I would watch them and pick up things. As a matter of fact, a big advantage for people who somehow get into the fringes of comic books — the assistants — is that we get to see the size of the paper, the pens, the tools. I've met

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Joe Rubinstein
Born: 4 June 1958 — Breslau, Germany
Occupation: Artist
When Did You Want To Become An Artist: At the age of five. I was a fat, immigrant kid who didn't know the language. I got hooked on comics because I thought that through drawing I could become a success without worrying about knowing English.
Unrealized Ambition: To have a one-man show of my paintings . . . and Linda Evans.
Most Asked Convention Question: Do you also want to be an artist?
Response: You have to be an artist to be an inker.
Favorite Activity On The Weekends: Jim Shooter and Me at a bar together as a sight gag.

HE WANTS THE MOB OFF THE STREETS! THE MOB WANTS HIM DEAD!

IT WAS A SOUTH AMERICAN MERCENARY NAMED LANDSMAN THAT AXE HIRED TO SNUFF THE STOOLIE.
WHERE ARE THEY HOLED UP?
I DON'T KNOW!
WRONG ANSWER. TRY AGAIN!

Mob boss Axe Sorganski takes his war straight to police headquarters in a stunning shootout! STREETFIGHTER seeks vengeance! Plus, beginning in this issue, the amazing origin of GANGLAND's GREATEST ENEMY . . .

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"I was 13 when I started at Continuity."

people who literally thought that the comic-book art was done on either side of the paper, so that when you flipped it — there it was, just like a comic book.

CHRIS: *I've met those people.*

JOE: You say, "What a jerk," like it goes without saying, but there are so many things that you don't really know anything about until you get there. **Tim Conrad** — I saw his stuff at a convention, and he was doing his artwork same size, because what did he know about reproduction? Who knows this stuff shrinks down? When I was a kid, I spend hours doing practice comic-book pages with a pen, filling in blacks with a pen, because I didn't know brushes were used for anything but painting walls. Then **Joe Kubert** came out with his SO YOU WANT TO BE A CARTOONIST page in his comic books, and I went, "Oh! Brushes, pencils, light on your page." All the things you should know. But working around Continuity, you got to see those things. For instance, **Russ Heath** took a lunch break and he left his magic brush lying there, and I said, "My God, **Russ Heath's** magic brush!" And I ran up and I dipped it in ink and I used it, and I could not use it. He uses a burnt cigar or something to ink with. *(Laughter.)* And it hit me, "It's not the tool, it's the person" — of course, that goes without saying. But if a kid from East Elephant Breath, Ohio, wants to ink, and he's got this dime store brush that's the length of his palm, then obviously you've got to find out what the good tools are, you have to understand reproduction. When I go to cons, these guys show me samples, and they will noodle, which means put little details all over the place which mean absolutely nothing. And I'll say, "This stuff won't reproduce," and they don't understand it because they see the artwork delicately done in the comic book, and they don't realize how crudely it was done in the original art. So working at Continuity exposed me to all the legends and working techniques. Then you take these things and you go out and you learn them. That's it — I shouldn't say any more about Continuity.

CHRIS: *Fine. So at seventeen you got your first job...*

JOE: Appropriately called "Tales of the Great Disaster." *(Laughter.)*

CHRIS: *Any particular reason why?*

JOE: Because it was. It was a back-

Athena from the MARVEL UNIVERSE HANDBOOK pencilled by Rudy Nebres and inked by Joe. Note here and in the following illustrations how Joe lets the penciller's style dominate.

"I don't have more right to an opinion than any fan."

up for KAMANDI, and it was after the great disaster that formed Kamandi's world. It thought it was very appropriate. My second job was the second installment. Then **Mike Nassar** got the KOBRA series to do, and editors are a creative lot — they see **Byrne** and **Austin** doing a book, and then they get **Byrne** to do one and they say, "Let's get **Austin**." And if they've got **Nassar**, and they've seen **Rubinstein** ink him, then "Let's get **Rubinstein**." A lot of high powered thinking involved with that.

CHRIS: *Well, actually, it isn't a bad idea, because if people see Kirby inked a certain way, then Kirby does another book, they want to see Kirby the same way. Don't you think that's a decision the editors have to make?*

JOE: Yeah, but that's why MAGNUM P.I. spawned HAWAIIAN HEAT. It's like, "Oh yeah! Hawaii works!" Maybe you want to see **Kirby** with **Sinnott** or **Byrne** with **Austin** all the time, but I heard **Byrne** say at the office once — he had just done some jobs, "Who are you going to get to ink it?" And they said, "Terry," and John said, "Oh, for God's sake, I like Terry's stuff a lot, but can't you think of somebody else this time, just to break the monotony?"

CHRIS: *But that's the artist's desire to create art, as opposed to the editor's desire to keep his job by generating sales. Which is more important in a business?*

JOE: In a business, business is more important, but. . .

CHRIS: *But part of the business is keeping the artist happy?*

JOE: Yeah, but the difference is — **Arthur Miller** writes DEATH OF A SALESMAN, and looks for his public, and **Spelling and Goldberg** decide their public is a bunch of morons and write for them by doing THE LOVEBOAT. Yes, you're in a business, and you want to be able to make money to support yourself, but ultimately I think you should do what is good, and then let somebody discover it's good. And if maybe this month **Jerry Ordway** inking the FANTASTIC FOUR is different than **Bryne** and **Austin**, and it's still totally saleable, then don't keep going to the same old stuff all the time. I'm sure Terry got bored doing that stuff. When I was doing the MICRONAUTS with **Mike Golden**, everything Mike drew for other editors, they came to me to ink. And it's like, "Well, I like Mike's stuff a lot, buy why don't you get somebody else, because I would like to see **Tom Palmer** ink **Mike Golden**, and maybe I can learn something from a different inker working on it." It's that fine line, but I don't know if it can be resolved. If you're in a business that has something to do artistically — which takes precedence — which is why you get so many **Golan & Globus** movies — ATTACK OF THE NINJA, RETURN OF THE ATTACK OF THE NINJA, MY SISTER THE NINJA, and I LOVE NINJA —

CHRIS: *And they make money too, so people do want to see them.*

JOE: They make money too, but — take **Roger Corman**, king of the B cheapie movies. I saw a documentary where **Jack Nicholson** was saying what a swell guy **Roger Corman is**, and **Peter Fonda** said that, "He taught me everything I know about directing," and so forth and so on. Well, if you put manure on a rose bush and you get beautiful roses, you still started with manure, and just because he sprang forth some really top

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Cover of INFINITY #13, pencilled by Don Newton. This was Don's last story before his death.

"If an artist lets the public dictate to him, he's a dead man."

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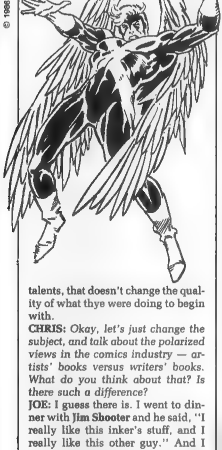


talents, that doesn't change the quality of what thye were doing to begin with.

CHRIS: *Okay, let's just change the subject, and talk about the polarized views in the comics industry — artists' books versus writers' books. What do you think about that? Is there such a difference?*

JOE: I guess there is. I went to dinner with **Jim Shooter** and he said, "I really like this inker's stuff, and I really like this other guy." And I said, "Are you kidding?" and I sort of dismissed them out of hand. And in the course of the conversation, I started mentioning the writers that I thought were good in the business, and he went, "Are you kidding?" and he dismissed those out of hand. Now I've read comic books all my life, and I don't know if I have any more right to an opinion about what a good story is than any fan out there. But when a writer comes to me and says, "Did you see the new spectacular artist we've got?" and I say, "He's really terrible," and he says, "Oh no, look how good he pulls this off." The guy can't draw, "But look at how nice the pictures are."

CHRIS: *That's one I'm getting tired of — bad art. "But the storytelling is so good!" Well, who cares — it's still bad art.*

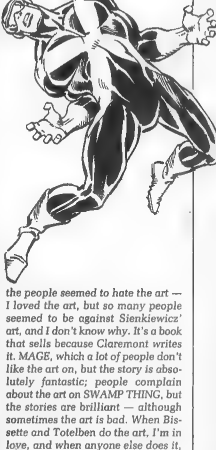
JOE: The thing is — in storytelling, you want the story to flow, and believe it, and if a panel is well composed, but the guy can't draw it, then it's not good storytelling because you can't believe this human being can walk. *(Laughter.)* I'm not saying he's a bad artist — **Carmine Infantino** is a good artist, but when he draws people walking, the right leg and the right arm always move in unison, which is totally contradictory to human movement — they're supposed to alternate. But Carmine's walk like they're doing a goose step.

CHRIS: Right, *like they're Nazis.*

JOE: And you never know. Face it, comic books are a visual medium. People, I think, buy them for what they're looking at. Then if the story isn't substantial, they probably won't come back. Sure, ther're plenty of people who want to be artists who just buy the good artwork, but let's face it — an **Alan Moore** story — I love SWAMP THING — with **Kevin Nowlan** or **Berni Wrightson** — same exact story, would have something to it rather than if you gave it to **Harvey Lambeck** to do. Remember him? **Erich von Zipper?** *(Laughter.)* I think a good story is a better story with good artwork around it, if it's a good comic-book story. What do you think is a writer's book out there that the writers are going ga-ga over?

CHRIS: *I would say NEW MUTANTS, which for some reason half*

Illustration from Joe's sketchbook.



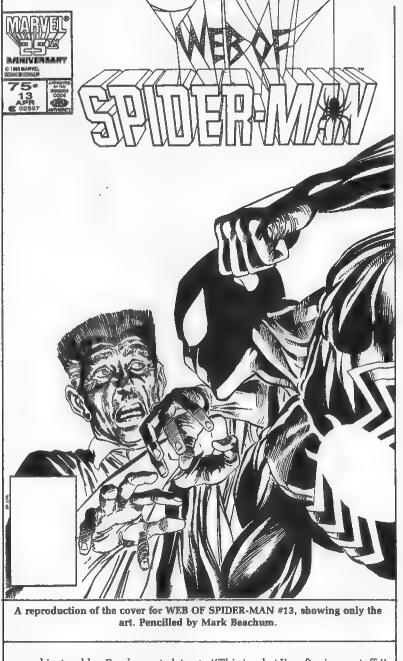
the people seemed to hate the art — I loved the art, but so many people seemed to be against Sienkiewicz' art, and I don't know why. It's a book that sells because Claremont writes it. MAGE, which a lot of people don't like the art on, but the story is absolutely fantastic; people complain about the art on SWAMP THING, but the stories are brilliant — although sometimes the art is bad. When Bissette and Totelben do the art, I'm in love, and when anyone else does it, I'm bored.

JOE: Did you see the **Ron Randall** art around the **Berni Wrightson** reprint story? I thought it was some of Ron's best stuff.

CHRIS: *Yeah, but I'm really into the look the book has, and I don't like it when I see otherwise. People were very discouraged when they saw RONIN because they expected a certain look — I liked it, myself. I like the whole book. I thought the storytelling was great, and I mean words and layouts. A lot of people hate RONIN; I don't know why. Half the people that read this are going to say, "That guy's crazy!" And it all comes down to O.M.O. — One Man's Opinon.*

JOE: On the subject of RONIN, if an artist or a musician — any sort of creative person — allows the public to dictate his work to him, he's a dead man. Because people picked up RONIN and said, "This is not DAREDEVIL, and this is not **Klaus Janson** either." If Frank had decided to do that he would have been in

"People say, 'If you sign this comic, will it



A reproduction of the cover for WEB OF SPIDER-MAN #13, showing only the art. Pencilled by Mark Beachum.

very big trouble. Frank wanted to stretch. Of course, nobody liked it at first, because they didn't know what to take from it. A lot of people have told me that they like my old stuff more than my new inking, and it's not fun to hear. I looked at my old stuff, and they're wrong. It's that simple. It's like, "No, no, I didn't like any of this stuff, and I didn't like the whole run of X-MEN that I did — my part og thejob. And you just have to sort of get blinders on and decide, "This is what I'm after in my stuff," and keep going for it. In music, for instance — no, let's not talk about music. *(Laughter.)* So as far as the art-work in RONIN goes, I thought Frank was experiementing, and that's the thing about experiments — you never know if they're going to fail or not, once you get into them. I like Frank's DAREDEVIL work better myself, artistically speaking, but as a package, RONIN probably set some real precedents.

CHRIS: *Let's sweepingly change the subject again, and move on to what seems to be the pet peeve of a lot of people — conventions.*

JOE: I look at conventions as like going on the **Carson** show — you push the product. I like conventions if they're professionally run, but the thing is, I've been to conventions where the only thing fans talk about is how much off the PRICE GUIDE they can get off this thing, and they're selling for ten dollars the sketch they badgered **Ron Wilson** for and he gave it to them free because they were nice kids. It's too commercial, and I find the point of money very distasteful as far as comic books go. People will turn to me and say, "If you sign this comic book, will it be worth more money?" *What do I care?* I'm not making a dime off this. If you want to make money, you may as well invest in federal bonds or something; comic books seem to be a strange way to trying to go at it. You meet some very nice people at conventions, some good friends — hi Sue, hi Cindy, hi Janet!

CHRIS: *The only person I know who meets good-looking women at conventions!* (Laughter.)

JOE: There are some wonderful-looking women at conventions. As a matter of fact, at my first convention I was twelve years old, and there were very few women there, and slowly but surely women are entering the field. I don't know if it's through boyfriends or husbands or if they're picking up on this stuff, but there are a lot more women at conventions, a lot more intelligent people in general at conventions. And they're kind of fun — there are too many conventions, especially in the New York area — people are jaded, they don't care.

Trouble is, there are too many amateurs running conventions, and all they are in it for is the money. Look, a rock star makes an album in the studio, and then you go out and buy the product, and then you go to a concert to see him do his stuff. A comic book artist works at home, you go buy his product — the comic book — and then you go to a convention to see him do his stuff. That's how I view it. You watch whoever do sketches, and **Chris Claremont** explain or not explain where the New Mutants are going this month. It's a wonderful experience being a comic-book artist. People ask you for your

be worth more money?' *What do I care?"*

autograph, they ask you questions as if you know something. They'll believe anything you tell them. They'll walk away going, "Gee, I didn't know that, wow!" Then you go to McDonalds and nobody bothers you. It's the best of both worlds. I paint, and draw, and do charcoals and stuff, and if I ever get to be a really famous portrait painter, I don't think a gallery in Dallas is going to fly me down for the weekend. On the other hand, the Dallas con calls up and says, "Hey, do you want to come down to our con?" That's wonderful, and it's a nice vacation, and it's a nice ego boost, being called mister, and people actually caring where you are. I have seen people at cons — professionals — who hate the fans, and it really bothers me the way they spit on these people, literally or otherwise. I think they resent the fact that this twelve year old is paying off this artist's condo, and he sort of feels obligated for it. I've seen people who won't do sketches of certain characters because they don't like the fact that Spider-Man has a new costume; come on, the kid saved up for two months — twenty bucks — do him a drawing or whatever. The Convensions are strenous because there are too many of them, and they run too long into the day, and if you are the only one of two guests there, they start to run you ragged. But all in all, they're a nice thing to get in touch with what's going on in the industry, because what do you know? You sit at home all day, chained to your desk, and you go to Marvel, you check to find out what your comic book sold, and you go home. But all in all, they're nice.

CHRIS: *Talking about your art for a second . . . where to start? With the actual fine art where you actually do the art, or with the inking, which is more the reason for the interview? Hell with it, let's start with the fine art! That seems like more fun to me, especially since I've seen it, and have been, as I always am, once again surprised, because it pops into my head, if you can draw that well, why do you ink?*

JOE: Oh, you mean, "Why do you trace when you could draw it yourself?" A kid came up to me, a lot of people as a matter of fact, and said, "Did you ever want to be, like, an artist?" meaning, "Did you ever want to draw comics, because that's the artist, and you're not an artist. You just take ink and trace things, right? " A comic-book inker has to be an artist; a man or a woman who knows how to draw. You can't be given a **John Buscema** drawing, which is beautifully executed, and not understand anatomy and movement and all those other things to pull it off. There are people in the industry who are tracers, who literally just follow what they do. It's as, if you're taking dancing lessons, and they put those numbered footsteps down — one, to the next, two, to the next — yeah, you'll hit the right spots, but it's not like **Fred Astaire** in an easy movement. I've been taking drawing classes since I was twelve or thirteen years old, and I do portrait painting, and charcoals, and landscapes, and all that stuff , and if all of that helps me to be a better inker because — well, for instance, **Gene Colan** draws in a

This shows the satirical mechnical underlay that was used in the background of the WEB #13 cover. Featuring Stan Lee and you-know-who.

"An inker is an artist with ink."

very tonal way. He does not put a definite line down, he puts sort of a smudge, and you're supposed to interpret it. You can't do that unless you know something about values in light and shade. To be able to be an inker, for all you would-be inkers out there, means you are an artist with ink, just as a penciller is an artist with a pencil. You have to understand how a shirt folds when you sit down, how a woman's hair bounces when she walks, what an expression does to the facial muscles. Too many people think that it's just tracing, and it's not. I hate it when I see beautiful artwork by **Alan Weiss**, **Dave Gibbons**, **Brian Bolland** or whoever given to an incompetent who doesn't understand enough to keep up with it. So many new inkers I've noticed, think their job is to fix the guy, as if, "Well, he's been in the business ten years, but I know more than he does." Sometimes a good inker is somebody who can just trace the artwork and understand it at the same time, that's the difference. **Brian Bolland** is about the tightest penciller I've ever seen. I've inked 164 different pencillers so far, and Brian is without exception the tightest, and yet if you look at the people who have inked him — **Bruce Patterson**, **Dick Giordano**, **Terry Austin**, me, **Dave Gibbons**, they all look different because we all looked at it a different way. You have to have a firm understanding and a firm background to pull this stuff off. Why don't I draw it? Because I can't relate to six foot tall people punching through walls. I don't really get any thrill out of figuring out a sequential page. To be honest about sequential storytelling, I don't think I could do it if I wanted to. I don't really understand how to make people jump through the air and walk from room to room and make it all flow. But the nice thing about being an inker is that you get to sort of share in other artists' work. I grew up reading **Curt Swan**'s SUPERMAN — I love **Curt Swan**'s SUPERMAN. I just had the opportunity to ink an eight-pager of his for DC. It was more fun than I've had in years, because I became an infinitesimal part of the Superman legend by doing the job. Nobody understands a penciller's work better than his inker. Nobody looks at it harder or longer. I looked at this job for maybe three weeks, eight hours a day, ever day really analyzing it,

Joe Rubinstein over Curt Swann in SUPERMAN #408.

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and loving every minute of it. You'll read the story and be through with it in two minutes. MARVEL UNIVERSE has been a wonderful opportunity for me to work with all kinds of legends that I never dreamed that I would have a chance to work with. For instance, **Nestor Redondo**, who never lets anybody else ink his stuff, **Brian Bolland**, **Joe Kubert** is going to be doing something for MARVEL UNIVERSE, which I'm ecstatic about, because to me, **Joe Kubert** is the best comic-book artist of all time, and I can hardly wait to make a fool of myself inking his three drawings.

CHRIS: *Who will he draw?*

JOE: Killer Shrike — because he's the closest thing that we have to Hawkman, since the Angel has already

"I've inked 164 different pencillers so far."

been done — Shanna, becuase editor **Mark Gruenwald** liked his RIMA covers, and Machinesmith from CAPTAIN AMERICA, because he's all we had left — sorry, Joe. *(Laughter.)* It's very nice to do comic books — it's a daily exercise of my drawing skills and my anatomical knowledge by imposing it on superheroes. Then, when I want to feed my soul, I do paintings and drawings where I start with a piece of white paper and do the whole statement as my own. **Bill Sienkiewicz** was talking to me the other day about how he wants to make a more personal statement in his artwork, to which I replied, "Swell, but how are you going to do that with a mutant?" Comic books are limited in what you can say. Obviously, if you're given Spider-Man — unless you're **Alan Moore**, who would probably kill him and bring him back as a real spider or something *(laughter)* — there's just so much you can say, so that's why you have to go off and do your own work and make a personal statement about it. Sure, there are people who just love the idea of doing a comic-book

THAT'S ALL, MASTER...
YOU'VE PROVEN YOURSELF FORMIDABLE...SHOWN US THE EXTENT OF YOUR POWER...
BUT WHEN YOU TRIED FLEXING YOUR MUSCLES AGAINST ME--
© 1988 DC Comics
--YOU PICKED THE WRONG GUY!

Joe on Joe — Rubinstein on Kubert, that is — in a page from HEROES FOR HOPE.

"I have seen pros who hate fans. It bothers

Joe over Jackson Guice's pencils on X-FACTOR.

page. I'm sure **John Byrne** is at his happiest when he's working on a page and figuring out the emotion, and the story, and the whole unit. I just want to make a very personal statement about whatever I'm drawing, whoever I'm drawing, and just be satisfied with that. I don't particularly want to communicate a story — I want to talk about a universal emotion — either the one I find the person, or the one I feel *for* the person. So comic books pay the bills, get me fan mail, and get me out to San Diego once a year...

CHRIS: *Keeps you off the streets.*

JOE: Sometimes — and painting and drawing make me happy, because if I don't paint and draw — if I have a terrible deadline and I can't get back to my easel, then I'm depressed for a week, because there's all that waiting for me to make a statement.

CHRIS: *Who do you like to ink?*

JOE: I could give you a list of guys, but generally I like the people who don't hand in the job, say, "Give me my check," and then walk away. For instance, when I did the WOLVERINE series with **Frank Miller**, I would ink it, and then call Frank and say, "Frank, what did you mean on page twelve?" And he'd explain it to me, and then I would work on it, then I would call him again, then I would arrange to meet him and show him the artwork, and we would talk about what the effects are and the joke was, "Just when you thought it was safe to answer the phone again, **Joe Rubinstein** called up," because I ws bugging Frank all the time about what these effects mean. I think **Alan Weiss** is the most difficult guy in the business to ink, without exception. He likes to look at the jobs as they are being worked on, and I like having him look at it to give me little clues on where I'm going. There are the older artists, who have been in the business longer, who seem to be jaded. They don't care that they're in comics, they don't care that they're producing quality or not. It's "I fooled them this week, gimme my check," and they don't care what the inking looks like, and I don't like that at all. As far as specifically who the guys are who are fun to ink: **Byrne** is good, **Brent Anderson** is fun, **Alan Weiss**, because he's tough, is fun — which is not to say just because you're a good artist, you're fun to ink. **Mike Nasser**, who I did the KOBRA with, is really boring to ink, which is not an indictment of Mike's work — but the fact is, I'd look at the page, and I'd know exactly what it would look like when it was finished, so I would have to go through the tedium of getting it to the mental image. With Alan's stuff, it's so intricate, you're not quite sure what you're going to wind up with. But basically, as the inker, I care if the storytelling is any good, because you have to understand what you are looking at. But first and foremost, is the drawing any good, or do I have to fix it, or is it loose and sketchy and weird and I don't know what this guy is talking about? So obviously, the guys that draw the best are the most fun to ink.

CHRIS: *Any difference in the approach you use for different pencillers?*

JOE: Well, I notice that most inkers do a homogenous style over whoever they ink. As much of a genius as **Alfredo Alcala** is, or **Tony DeZuniga**, I think they turn everybody into **Alfredo Alcala**, into **Tony DeZuniga**. **Dick Giordano**, who taught me — his whole thrust is this — keep the penciller looking like the penciller. When you are given a **John Buscema** drawing, they would like a **John Buscema** drawing back, not a **Joe Rubinstein**. I have the same basic approach to everybody. An inker is a storyteller just like the penciller is a storyteller. How to make this glass believable, so that it is sitting on a table that is believable, next to a man and a chair that are believable? If all that works, the story can continue. If the perspective is off, then the viewer stops and is reminded that he is looking at a bunch of pictures. I sit down and say, "How do I make this object look solid? What is the light source? Is there a shadow being cast? Is the anatomy right? Is the shirt folded in the proper spot? Does the hair look like hair? Does all of this make sense? Is the expression accurate?" and so forth and so on. So all that is a must for whoever I ink. When you ink **Alan Weiss**, who is terribly complicated, you use a more complicated rendering style. When you do **Paul Smith**, you decide what the important individual aspects of his style are. He's very linear, his stuff is more

© 1986 WCM

me the way they spit on these people."

© 1988 MCG

graphic than **Alan Weiss**. You don't put the same lines down on a **Frank Miller** piece that you do on a **Paul Smith** piece, as you do on a **Alan Weiss** piece. I get tired of these guys — inkers who decide that they know better than the penciller. It's almost a contemptuous act in my mind — "Oh, you don't know what you're doing, I'll make you look like I make everybody else look." The reason, by the way, that I was chosen in this context to do MARVEL UNIVESE is because I did an inkers' round table for a magazine called COMICS SCENE, where **Klaus Janson**, **Tom Palmer**, **Bob Layton** and myself all inked a **Mike Zeck** drawing. **Mark Gruenwald** saw these and decide that mine was the clearest to understand what the character looked like, not necessarily the best inked, and when I came back from the San Diego con — I think it was two years ago, after finishing the WOLVERINE mini-series and not knowing what my next assignment was — Mark said, "We're doing this encyclopedia, and we would like you to ink as many of the figures as you want." And I said, "I'll ink all of them," which turned into a gold mine and a godsend. *(Laughter.)* And he picked me because he knew that I would not make a homogenous look of it, and I honestly think I chameleon my style enough to where I do **Brian Bolland** justice, and **Mike Golden**, and **Al Milgrom**, and **Alan Weiss** — and that's all been real nice.

CHRIS: *Why do people suddenly start saying, "Well, everyone is going to look like me"?*

JOE: Well, you know — something that might be hard to understand if you're not a comic-book artist is — as an inker, it takes me less time to do it my way than to do it your way. Yet you're saying, "The pencils are tight, you don't have to think do you?" Yeah, but I have to figure out what you were trying to tell me. If I ignore it, and put down my usual lines, then I will go faster through it.

Next issue Joe talks about the Philippino inkers, Klaus Janson's influence, his running argument with Bill Sienkiewicz, why he hates the idea of a 9to5 job, his feelings about the business side of comics, tired old pros, and (as if we need to tell you) more!

Mantis by John Buscema and Joe Rubinstein from the (so-far) still-born SILVER SURFER Limited Series. This illustration was eventually used in the MARVEL UNIVERSE HANDBOOK.

"There are more books out now than there

BILL BLACK

While visiting my parents on the west coast of Florida, I decided to call on Bill Black, head honcho of Americomics. "I guess you want your occupation listed in COMICS INTERVIEW as Publisher," I said, getting my very first interview for David Kraft off to what I thought was a brilliant start. "No," Bill replied in that gentle-but-firm tone of voice of his — "Artist. I consider myself an artist first." Oh well.

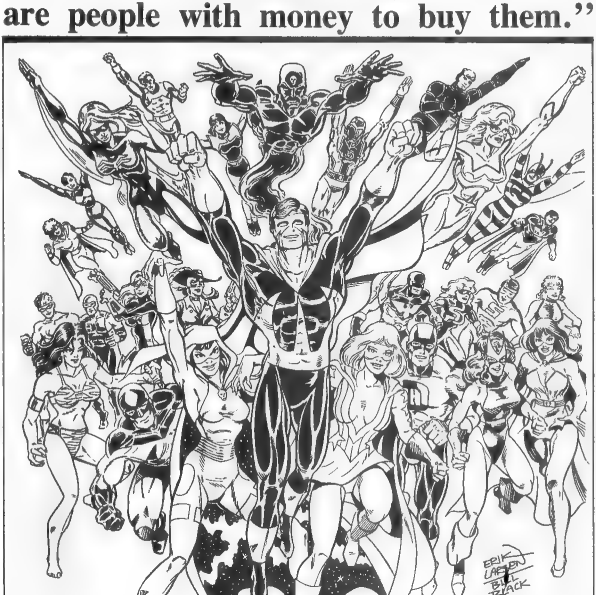
MARK BORAX: *What titles is Americomics currently publishing?*

BILL BLACK: Let me break it down — we have two categories. In the first category are the AC comic titles, which I own and edit. In the second category are what I call creator-owned comics, books that are owned by the person who draws and writes them. The AC comics are NIGHTVEIL, FEMFORCE and SENTINELS OF JUSTICE. The actual title of SENTINELS OF JUSTICE is CAPTAIN PARAGON AND THE SENTINELS OF JUSTICE, in small print at the top. The creator-owned books I publish are DRAGONFLY, by **Rik Levins**, SPACE ARK by **Ken Mitchroney** and POWER PLAYS by **Mike Kelly**. We also have a successful 4-part mini-series called FAZE 1 FAZERS by **Vic Bridges. Vic is a very talented young man of 20. He is self-taught. One can see a distinctive John Byrne** influence in his art. This 4-part mini-series of his own characters is quite an undertaking and I'm enjoying seeing his style emerge. His head is full of characters and I have to keep after him to

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Bill Black
Born: 14 September 1943
Occupation: Artist-Publisher-Editor-Janitor!
Residence: Longwood, FL
Training: B/A in Advertising from Florida State University
Comics Credits: CREEPY, EERIE, late 1970s Marvel books, Americomics.
Favorite Movie: Fellini's 8.5
Pet Peeve in Comics Industry: None, really. I'm a pretty easy going guy.

are people with money to buy them."



The Americomics heroes.

limit them so that he can get into their personalities.

MARK: *Sounds like Americomics has a blend of super-hero and fantasy.*

BILL: Predominately super-hero, all color with the exception of POWER PLAYS, which is still black-and-white. All sell for $1.75, all supposed to be bi-monthly. *(Laughter).*

MARK: *How did these creators get a hold of you?*

BILL: When I started AC comics in '82 we were dealing primarily with characters that I created. I allowed the people who worked for me to have at least one character of their own that we would publish. **Rik Levins** was drawing Shade and various other things. I got a hold of him through **Bill Pearson** at Charlton, who put out the CHARLTON BULLSEYE. Rik had done a Blue Beetle story and I got the rights to publish that. I got to know Rik well and loved his ideas. I suggested he move down to Florida from New Jersey — which he did. He does DRAGONFLY, which is his own creation. He does it *completely* on his own. That means he is funding it as well as writing and drawing it, like an independent movie released through Warner Brothers.

MARK: *How do you split the profits?*

BILL: Uh — essentially we don't split the profits.

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"Charlton didn't pay them a nickel."

MARK: *Are there any profits?*
BILL: *(Emphatically)* Yeah! But it all goes to Rik. We had an agreement where it used to be 70/30 — he would get 70 and I would get 30. But what we do on DRAGONFLY and POWER PLAYS is that we take the profit and keep it in a business account, and we each draw on that money for the next issue — it goes back into the book. AC comics does not take in any *profits* on these books, just expenses.
MARK: *Do you function as an editor for Rik?*
BILL: I'm supposed to, yes, and I say "suppose to" because the main failing that I had when I first started AC comics was that we grew too fast — we took too many books and too many people. I have now streamlined what I'm doing. I'm in charge of those three books I mentioned before — NIGHTVEIL, FEMFORCE and SENTINELS OF JUSTICE. Those come first to me — I have to do that. The other books have to take second place. As Rik does his art, he brings in the pencilled pages and we critique it at that point. I have complete faith in Rik as far as the quality of the story.

© 1985 Vic Bridges

FAZE ONE art by Vic Bridges.

"By Black September of '83, the bot-

MARK: *Why is DRAGONFLY produced differently from the other two creator-owned books?*

BILL: They all differ because the creators are such different types of people. **MARK:** *Rik does DRAGONFLY pretty much as a one-man operation?*

BILL: Yes, and he also is in charge of POWER PLAYS. In fact, he brought POWER PLAYS to my attention, and I said "Rik — I don't have time to handle it, but if you want to handle it, fine." **Mike Kelly** produces the complete package. So the production is no problem whatsoever. Rik handles the rest. SPACE ARK and FAZERS are different — these books probably take up most of my time now because we're dealing with new talent and people who aren't that versed in the production end. I have to spend alot of time with **Ken Mitchroney** on the production end. He's working with **Mark Cantrell**. They co-write and Ken draws the whole thing. He either inks or we have one of our AC people ink it. I take care of the letters and the coloring and the color separations and all that.

MARK: *You say "one of our AC people." How many AC people are there?*

BILL: That's a good question! *(Laughter.)* I'm not sure! There must be 15, 20, 25, although I don't know when you break it down into all the categories. We are the only company that I'm aware of that also does color separations. We have three or four or five inkers. I guess there'd be about 25 people if you put it all together. **MARK:** *Do you have an office where you all hang out, or is it farmed out through the mail?*

BILL: Most of it is done through the mail. Rik and **Ken Mitchoney** and the color separators are the only ones that are local, here in central Florida. Also **Tom Scott**, the letterer. Everybody that I have working for me I either knew from before I started AC — like **Mark Heike**, I've known him for years — or they came in through the CHARLTON BULLSEYE, and I don't mean that statement to imply that I want a lot of people to send submissions to me! Definitely not! No more submissions! We have a good crew now and we're not expanding in any way. And we just don't have the time to respond. **MARK:** *These creators weren't going to be paid?*

BILL: Right. Charlton didn't pay them a nickel.

MARK: *So what was the incentive for them — exposure?*

BILL: Yes — to get published, to show people what they could do. When the book folded, **Pearson** called me up and said "Hey — I'm looking for a publisher. I have somewhere better than 250 pages of stories that I've promised these people would be published — now I can't publish it . . ." So I took over some of that material — Blue Beetle stories, things like that.

MARK: *When was this?*

BILL: 1983.

MARK: *When you'd just formed?*

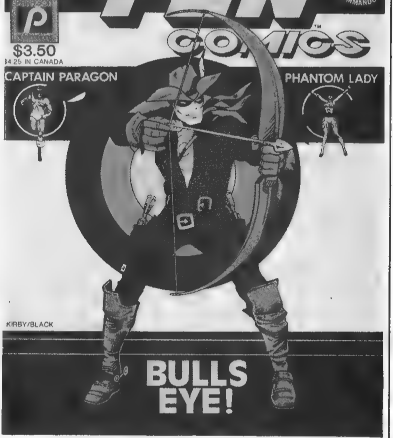
BILL: Right. We started AC in mid-year '82 — released our first color book in January '83 — the fourth issue of FUN COMICS. It had been a black-and-white title I did, called BILL BLACK'S FUN COMICS, done back when we were Paragon Publications.

MARK: *That was mostly your baby?*

BILL: Yeah. I guess I should go into how we started this whole thing. About 1970 I started doing Paragon Publications, which was irregular, to say the least. We had several different titles, but we could only put out one a year, or maybe three books a year, three different titles. At Paragon I did almost the whole ball of wax, but I hired some other people to do pencilling.

MARK: *What were some of the publications?*

BILL: The main magazine was called PARAGON, and it featured comic stories of characters that I created, as well as articles on film, golden age comic books, things like that. And a western called



One of Bill Black's first publications.

© 1983 Paragon Publications

tom dropped out of everything!''

© 1989 Americomics

An example of ''good-girl-art-in-outer-space'' by Paul Gulacy.

MACABRE WESTERNS — one of the few western titles, and STAR FEMS, which was ''good-girl-art-in-outer-space,'' things like that. I did most of the writing, quite a lot of the inking and some of the pencilling, but I had other people like **Mark Hempel**, **Mark Heike** and **Jerry Ordway**. When I formed AC comics in '82 I was doing this as an outgrowth of Paragon. I was totally unaware of the impending explosion of comics. The film production company I was working for was sold, so I decided to publish full-time. What I had did was commission my regular artists to do a series of short stories which I would package as an anthology book. I would be able to come out with a single title that would be published on a *bi-monthly basis*. I did this to please the distributors who were always griping ''no one knows when your next books are coming out.'' The name of the book was AMERICOMICS. When I put the package together, we had been selling in the neighborhood of five or six thousand of the black-and-white. We found a good deal on the printing, to go to color and, like I said, we did our own separations. In fact, I separated the first couple of books myself — that saved two grand right there! We started with only $4000. When we put the first book out, I anticipated that we might possibly be able to sell 10,000. We actually sold 20,000! At this time the only alternate book that existed was Pacific's CAPTAIN VICTORY. They were just coming out with STARSLAYER, late '82. We'd planned for our first books to come out in December, but as I found out over the years — you can't really trust a printer to get the book out on time! It came out in mid-January. We were, I think, the third independent color comic-book publisher to come out. Pacific and First, and then us. The distributers were very positive about the idea of me putting out a color book. The thing hit really well! The second book we put out went up around 30,000 sales, and the third book went over 40,000! I couldn't believe anything like this was happenning! Those sales were phenomenal for the market that existed prior to this.

MARK: *So you were pretty encouraged to expand at that point!*

BILL: Exactly, and that's what happenned — we saw the gold mine in the sky — which of course did not exist! *(Laughter.)* We hired a lot more people and planned all these other books and commissioned, way in advance, all these stories. By, I guess it was, Black September of '83, the bottom dropped out of everything! I don't know how many other publishers came on board, but quite a lot. Now there must be, what, 40 publishers in black-and-white and color? There are more books out now than there are people with money to purchase them all!

MARK: *But don't you think we're now seeing the reversal of Black September — with a lot of them starting to go under?*

BILL: Oh yeah, absolutely, but new publishers are still popping up. Anyway, we put out a lot of black-and-white books in '84 purely for economical reasons. In '83 I had purchased all this artwork, but our sales had dropped down because there were so many other publishers.

MARK: *So you had a lot of stuff to get out as inexpensively as possible?*

BILL: Exactly. We had all this artwork to publish, that was paid for, but our circulation was too low to print in color.

MARK: *Have any of the creators who*

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"My people are not imitating Marvel."

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Ms. Victory getting a kick out of her "job." Drawn by Cynthia Martin.

submitted back then gone on to the so-called major leagues?

BILL: Yes.

MARK: *Drop some names.*

BILL: Gladly. **Paul Ryan**, who is a great guy — I've talked to him on the phone a lot but never met him. **Marty Greim** sent me a videotape of Paul so I know what he looks like! *(Laughter.)* Paul's a great, great fella. He did a character called Breed, which was a science-fiction story he'd submitted to CHARLTON BULLSEYE. Paul has gotten in with Marvel Comics now, and has done a couple of issues of THE THING, just recently done an IRON MAN, and he has a SQUADRON SUPREME story out. He is doing the Thor graphic novel — couldn't happen to a better guy!

MARK: *Don't you sometimes wish there was a secret underground place where all the comics creators could actually meet? So much of this business happens over the phone or by the mail.*

BILL: Yes, it does. I am one of the sponsors of the Orlando Con here every year, and two years ago we had, gosh, maybe 20 of the Americomics people down, and that was a lot of fun 'cause I got to meet people from all over the country. To get back to your question, **June Brigman** —

MARK: *POWER-PACK.*

BILL: She did work for me first. In fact, she had asked me to script a story for her that she could show to **Dick Giordano** at an Atlanta convention he was going to attend. She did a story with a character of mine called Astron which got her in at DC, and when that didn't work out she went to Marvel, which worked out very well. I haven't published that story yet, but I'm planning to this summer. **Cindy Martin**. Cindy wasn't really one of my people, she was brought in by **Phil White**, who's out in California. He put a package together which became the MS. VICTORY SPECIAL. Cindy showed that artwork to somebody at Marvel at the San Diego Convention and that led to her drawing STAR WARS on a regular basis. You asked that question like everybody should think that working for Marvel Comics is the ultimate end! Having once worked for Marvel myself, I too sort of had that idea, but after actually doing it I certainly no longer have that idea at all!

MARK: *What did you do at Marvel?*

BILL: I was hired by **Roy Thomas**, as an inker, and inked some books for him in the late '70s. I was very disappointed

"Our women are beautiful, but they're

An Americomics take-off of the movie poster for ATTACK OF THE 50-FOOT WOMAN.

when I first saw what they called pencils! We don't do those kind of pencils at AC comics.

MARK: *Can you be more explicit?*

BILL: Yeah — when we draw a motorcycle we don't draw two circles with an oval in the middle and some lines around the top! Which is what I got in one of the WHAT IF? stories. My people are not trying to imitate Marvel. **Mark Helke**, in particular, goes to geat lengths to turn out a very good product. He will do breakdowns of the story, work them up on tissue roughs, and then light-box that onto regular art paper, and rework and rework his pencils, erase them and whatnot until he gets pretty close to what he wants — and he's never satisfied! He often light-boxes it again, so that what he delivers to me is precise and perfect! Now, he can't do that on an assembly line basis, like when you're working for Marvel or DC.

MARK: *Can he get the same financial compensation from AC, though?*

BILL: Absolutely not! He does not get his worth out of it, no.

MARK: *So how long can he continue that unless he has some kind of sideline?*

BILL: I think that most of us here have sidelines going. Mark actually has turned down work at both Marvel and DC. You know, a lot of people would rather have the opportunity to do their own thing and not be restricted —

MARK: *By corporate policy?*

BILL: Not so much corporate policy, that's part of it, but also the deadlines. You know, way back in the '30s someone said that comic books come out monthly, and I have seen in many very young men a great deal of stress and physical impairments that come about because of these deadline problems. I don't crack them up very much myself — I don't do it as much as I should, but then I feel on the other hand that I'm not paying them much. I'm paying them as much as I can but I'm not paying them what they're worth. Okay, so I make some allowances. I try to make things as easy on them as possible, yet people like **Mark Helke** or **Erik Larsen** go above and beyond the call of duty — put far more work into it than what the script requires. **Doug Hazlewood** does that with his inks. God, I appreciate that — I mean, that's fantastic!

MARK: *Do the readers respond to the amount of effort that goes in?*

BILL: Yes. We get quite a lot of good mail, I'm very pleased with that — we did not, in 1983. We have come a long way. The one thing that I'm proud of is that our books continue to improve from issue to issue. I think we're starting to get the recognition, and I like that!

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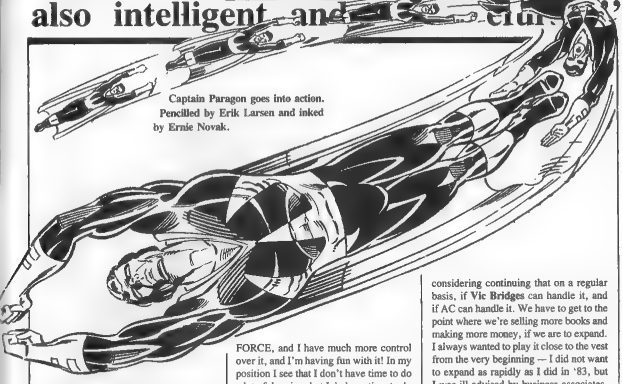
also intelligent and [illegible]



Captain Paragon goes into action. Pencilled by Erik Larsen and inked by Ernie Novak.

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MARK: *Since you've curtailed your submissions, and your staff is as large as you'd like, what are Americomics' plans for the future?*

BILL: I suppose we might grow sometime down the line, but right now I've gone through over a year of working 12 to 15 hours a day, 7 days a week — and I don't know how long I can take this kind of strain! That's why I'm limiting things. I haven't been affected by it — I'm okay, I'm in good health and all that — but you know, it stands to reason, how long can you go on like that? When I first started, everybody would send in submissions and I'd think "God — this guy's great — this guy should be published!" So I'd give the guy a chance. But I ended up giving too many people a chance, so that what I ended up doing was talking to people over the phone and shuffling papers! I was no longer a creator, and I had to ask myself what was I getting out of it — I certainly wasn't getting any money out of it! I don't think money is the main goal anyway. I'm an artist and I want to express myself through my work, and I want to get the stuff out to the people. So I consolidated, put characters together in groups, like Captain Paragon and the Scarlet Scorpion. Commando D went together with the other Sentinels of Justice. Another thing that was going awry was that I was having different writers doing different books that the same characters appeared in, and that was driving me crazy! The continuity was getting screwed up. Now I'm writing SENTINELS and I'm writing FEMFORCE, and I have much more control over it, and I'm having fun with it! In my position I see that I don't have time to do a lot of drawing, but I do have time to do the writing. I'm getting considerable enjoyment out of that.

MARK: *You're probably also getting a lot more sympathy for Marvel and DC, who have to put together massive series' like CRISIS and SECRET WARS in order to straighten out their continuity!*

BILL: Absolutely! *(Laughter.)* No doubt about it. That CRISIS was a tremendous series. But back to growth in the future: we're going to continue to put out things like FAZE 1. It's going so well that we're considering continuing that on a regular basis, if **Vic Bridges** can handle it, and if AC can handle it. We have to get to the point where we're selling more books and making more money, if we are to expand. I always wanted to play it close to the vest from the very beginning — I did not want to expand as rapidly as I did in '83, but I was ill-advised by business associates. If I had listened to my own head, and my wife, it would have been a lot smoother.

MARK: *So have you caught up with yourself or are you still trying?*

BILL: I think we're in pretty good shape! Financially we're okay, we're not in debt, I pay my bills on time. Our circulation bottomed out about October of '84 and it has grown since then, every month it increases. It does not increase in leaps and

Nightveil, originally called Phantom Lady. Pencilled by Mark Heike and inked by Doug Hazlewood.

PARTICLE Dreams

Some things are dangerous, y'know?

"At first AC Comics grew too fast."

bounds, but it increases a little bit.

MARK: *What are some of your circulation figures?*

BILL: I don't really want to get into that, but obviously it's not really great — I don't get the feeling that anybody is doing really great. But I'm very happy. Financially we're doing better now than when we were selling 40,000 copies. That's because the money is being better managed. 30,000 was my breakeven point — when circulation dropped below 30,000 I had to retool completely and find different printers, which I've done. We're now able to put out a book below 30,000 that breaks even. All of our books break even.

MARK: *What factors go into determining a breakeven point?*

BILL: The main cost in the production of a book is the printing cost. The greater the number of books printed, the lower the cost per book. Our printing cost per book is much higher that Marvel or D.C. This is how the "direct system" works: I'm charging $1.75 for my books, which everybody thinks is a high price. It is — I think it's a high price! But what I get out of that is 70¢ — I have to sell the book at 60% off to the distributors. On top of that I have to pay for the shipping. So I'm really getting 60-65¢ out of that 70¢.

MARK: *Shouldn't it be the distributor's job to pay for the shipping?*

BILL: Hey — I always thought it was! But they hit you with this: "Marvel pays for the shipping!" So, if you want to be in this business you have to conform. It's very difficult for the little guy, but I'm not looking for any sympathy.

MARK: *So what happens to the remaining 60-65¢?*

BILL: You've got your printing bills, your color separation bills, commission bills for the artwork, scripting, lettering and all that. Your office rent, telephone calls... And we don't have 6 to 9 pages of paid advertising to help defray costs.

MARK: *Do you have enough left to go out and buy a sandwich?*

BILL: *Oh yeah!* Barely! You see, when you start your own business, your business is your *life*, and every penny you make from that business is poured back into the business. Most small businesses take serveral years to get into the profit area. Now we're at the point where I have no problem paying for the art or script as it's turned in and I have no problem paying the printer on time. In fact I pay the printer up front! This fledgling industry of ours has learned a lot in these last couple of years. We have had problems with distributors not paying for their books, or printing books for them and then having to cut them off because they're not paying their bills. The distributors that stick you, like Sea Gate — they've gone bankrupt. It's levelling off now so that I know that if a distributor orders x-amount of copies, that I'm gonna ship the book to him and I'm gonna get *paid!* I'm not worried about that anymore. We have distributors out there that are doing a really good job now, like Capital City and Diamond. There's **Bud Plant**, and who, I think, must be doing an excellent job — I told **Jim Friel** in **Bud Plant**'s number two location, California, that for some reason, we get more letters from California than any other state, saying, "We can't find your books!" I see his orders now, month by month, going up a pretty good percentage. This means that he's making a better effort as a distributor to restock the shelves, making sure that people know about the books. Our circulation is so low that stores are just buying a miminum number. So if someone interested in the book doesn't get there the day the book goes on the stands, then he's liable to miss out on it. If they only get five or ten copies in, and he's number eleven — he doesn't get it! Within the current system it's very difficult for a store to get back issues. It shouldn't be, but it is. That's because of the horrible things that happened in late '83 - '84. Distributors are gun shy, and rightly so because they don't want to get stuck with books in their warehouse! So they don't reorder from me, with the exception of Capital City, **Bud Plant**, and Second Genesis. So the eleventh guy in the store just loses out — he can't get the book.

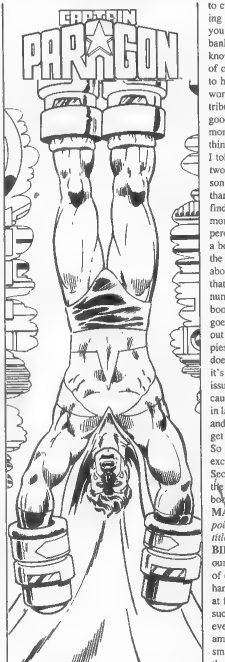
MARK: *Do you get letters from disappointed fans who can't find their favorite title?*

BILL: Yes, lots so we've put an ad for our back issues on the inside back covers of our books. We don't have the time to handle this, really, we're not very efficient at filling back orders, but we are selling such a great number of back issues that every month we make a larger dollar amount than we make from some of our smaller distributors! That shows me that there are people out there who want to buy the books but can't find them.

MARK: *It must be frustrating for a publisher to know that there are people out there who want to buy your product but can't find it.*

BILL: That's right. We have so much work to do just getting the books out that we don't have the time to do the P.R. that we need to do.

MARK: *How do you think the distribution system could be changed to eliminate these problems?*



Captain Paragon gets hung up on technology. Pencilled by Greg Guler and inked by Kevin Dzuban.

© 1986 Americomics

"We're not doing stupid women with big

BILL: I think they're taking steps in the right direction. **Bud Plant** is holding seminars and, I think, Glenwood, Capital City, a couple of the others — excuse me if I leave somebody out — but they're holding regional seminars, like at the San Diego Convention, the Chicago Convention, where they're having experts who've had experience in the "direct" field, talk to the retailers and explain to them what they can do to increase their sales. Now, Marvel and DC have a lot of money so they put out all these color posters. We can't afford to do anything like that — I can't even afford advertising. What's happening with me now is that we have a firm foundation of readers who are going to buy enough books for us to go a little beyond the breakeven point. As our circulation grows we get a little more money and then we can afford to advertise and maybe branch out. But it's word of mouth now. We get a lot of letters, very positive response. That makes me feel very good.

MARK: *Did you get your business training on the job?*

BILL: *(Laughter.)* Yes — the hard way! Actually, as a business, it's fairly simplistic once you get it set up because you know pretty much what it's gonna cost, you know how many books you're gonna sell. It's a matter of billing the distributors and they send you the money! Compared to most businesses I think that's very simple. But when I first started out I had a business manager. I handled the editorial end and did not deal at all with the business. Boy, was that a mistake! I was loaded down with more work than I could handle and didn't really pay that much attention to what the business manager was doing. By the time I found *out* what was happening and fired him, we were in a little bit of trouble! I got all that straightened out in 1984 and early '85. Now, we've got it, I won't say as efficient as it *can* be, or as it's *going* to be, but we've got it to where I can handle the business aspects, too.

MARK: *Where did you get your artistic training?*

BILL: I have a BA in advertising design from Florida State, but I got no training in drawing comic books there. I inherited my artistic talent from my mother. She had no training, she was just a natural artist and an amazing woman. She died a couple of years ago from arthritis. You've probably never heard of anybody dying from arthritis, Mark — her body just withered. Watching what she did as an ar-

© 1986 Americomics

Have Ms. Victory and Blue Bulleteer suffered a deflating experience? Pencilled by Mark Heike and inked by Bill Black.

knockers involved in sexual antics."

© 1986 Americomics

tist was, I think, what's given me my tenacity. My mother drew with charcoal, pencil, pastels; she did water colors, but what you have to understand is that arthritis is a crippling disease that gets worse and worse as the years go by. It got to the point where she could only sit up a couple hours a day, but she was still drawing and working! When she had to give up the paints because they were too cumbersome, she worked with pastels. Her fingers just flopped loose. She had to have her fingers strapped with splints so that she could hold the crayon! I think I owe a lot to her. She got worse and worse, but she still kept it up until the day she died. She liked to draw beautiful women. That's probably where I got the inspiration. You know, I do mostly super-heroines. It's much more interesting to me than drawing all those muscle-bound guys!

MARK: *Did you send her your line of comics?*

BILL: Most certainly, yes. Unfortunately, she passed away right before we started Americomics, but yes, she was very supportive. So is my father — my father did a really neat thing. I grew up in a small town in Pennsylvania. Like most kids who are into comics, I had a favorite newsstand that I always went to. My father sent a bunch of Americomics up to the very same newsstand where I'd bought my first comics. They were put in the front window. When we visited my old home town last summer, the guy says, "Oh, Bill — I have something for ya!" and he puts this envelope on the counter and dumps out this money, says he sold all the comic books! I said, "What are you talking about?" and he told me what my father had done.

MARK: *A perfect circle! We're running out of time here, Bill — is there anything else you'd like to talk about before we go?*

BILL: Yeah. Let me talk about this for a minute. I don't know if you've read some of the criticism of my books in other publications, but some of them are putting down FEMFORCE and my other books that have female characters in them.

MARK: *For what reasons?*

BILL: They say, uh, that they're sexist — big bouncing boobs jiggling across the pages, I-guess. That's not my intention, and that's not what we're doing. I think if they really *read* the comics they'd be able to see beyond that. Actually, we get a lot of mail from women who tell us that for the first time they have found comic books that they can identify with! That Nightveil and some of the other female characters are good role models. I can show you these letters.

MARK: *Where is the adverse criticism coming from?*

BILL: I'm talking about AMAZING HEROES and COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE. I don't get AMAZING HEROES, but some of this is brought to my attention by other staff members. All our women are beautiful and well endowed, but they're no more endowed than Sue Richards, She Hulk or anybody like that. I think **Mark Heike** and **Mark Propst** just do a better job of drawing women. They draw them so feminine! and **Doug Hazlewood**'s inks enhance this quality. For the most part,super-heroines in other comics are like men with boobs! We try to approach them as real women, feminine, but we're just starting these titles and it's going to take a while for us to develop the personalities and characters of these people. I *believe* in these female characters and I know that **Mark Heike**, **Mark Propst**, and **Doug Hazlewood**, do too. We're making a concerted effort to make them real people. The women I think the critics are really talking about are, like, what is it **Harvey Kurtzman** does for PLAYBOY — LITTLE ANNIE FANNY? We're not doing stupid women with big knockers involved in sexual antics. Our women are beautiful, but they're intelligent and resourceful, they stand on their own. Readers comment that our females are not just carbon copies of their male counterparts. I'm proud that the readers see that, and I really don't care so much what the critics say, except that they may influence some potential buyers. I'll take the word of the readers, because they're the people who really count. . .the ones who read and enjoy the books.

MARK: *Anything else?*

BILL: Let me see . . . I think that you'll see some improvement with the books we have forthcoming, such as SENTINELS OF JUSTICE, which began with the third issue. **Erik Larsen** is an extremely good penciller, and punctual — wow, he's very good. **Errik Novak** is inking — I'm writing the title — I think there's going to be more excitement and more character development from the third issue on. We're starting a storyline in NIGHTVEIL where she's trying to recapture the human side of her personality. It has been buried for many years as she studied the magic arts. She's a sorceress and the very nature of the character makes her aloof. . .she has so much power. In this upcoming story we have a love interest going for her. **Steve Ringgenberg** writes the book, but I'm doing a fill-in on number five, where we have this slice-of-life. I'd also like to say something about SPACE ARK. SPACE ARK is a "funny animal" book, and I'm not particularly fond of funny animals, but I'm a very big fan of **Ken Mitchroney** who's drawing this book. I think the reason that I have not been enamored of "funny animal" books is because most of them are not funny! Ken's art is funny! The faces, the expressions that Ken draws on these characters — they crack us up! We're sitting here trying to do the color guides and separations on the thing and we can't — we just start laughing!

Ms. Victory "busts" out. Pencilled by Mark Heike and inked by Bill Black.

MARK: *You're trying to put the "comic" back into comic books?*

BILL: Yeah. In my whole line in general, I guess I should say I am not for the antihero — I want to put entertainment and fun into the comics. Captain Paragon will have problems, but you will not go into a blue funk after reading every issue. I have a very positive attitude toward life and I hope that it's reflected in my books.

LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

ASTOUNDED BY CARING

Dear Dave,

I received your response to my inquiry about some issues I missed from my subscription. Within about two weeks of writing you then, I received the issues I missed (two in one day even!) There must be a bottleneck somewhere. This happens all the time with my copies of CBG, but your magazine usually arrives even before I find it in the store. The long dry spell is what got me worried.

My main reason for writing is to thank you for responding. I have indeed talked to the people at my post office as you suggested. Because you bothered to look into the problem and let me know where things are at on your end, I can track down and deal with the problem that's on my end.

You have an excellent magazine that I always enjoy and that is why I didn't want to write off the loss. It is also why I have re-subscribed. Thanks again for astounding me by caring.

Richard Balcanoff
P. O. Box 283
Greenfield, MA 01302

And thank you, Richard, for noticing!
— DAK

OOPS!

Dear Dave,

Riddle me this: Why no current photo of **Burt Ward?**
All the shots you ran were 20 years old. Holy ancient history! The interview was a bit brief, but then it's hard to answer questions when you're tied to a mammoth barbeque grill (or was he being devoured by a giant clam?)

In general, I prefer your hodge-podge mish-mash potpourri of topics and creators as opposed to your theme issues. Actually, it depends on the topic. Batman, ok, he's fairly interesting. Other times, however, such as the Thunder Agents and giant

robots... Well... anesthetizing darts couldn't have been any more effective.

Suggestions? You bet. How about a quadruple size **Kirby** issue? Jack's got half a century of comics history for you to explore.

Or **Steve Ditko** (only 35 years of work from him, so you may have to cut back to a triple size issue).

Try **Gene Colan**, **Don Heck**, **Dick Ayers** **Joe Sinnott** or **Mort Drucker**. All these people should be talking into your handy mike.

And, should you do a sequel to your Batman issue, how about **Burgess Meredith** and **Cesar Romero**? (Probably find them both in the Gotham State Pen.)

Joe Frank
4425 N 78th St #260-B
Scottsdale, AZ 85251

CLINT EASTWOOD — SI! ADAM WEST & BURT WARD — NO!

Dear Editors,

So, **Burt Ward** and **Adam West** think that if they're not in the new BATMAN movie that the makers are blowing millions at the box-office. Surely these guys are jesting, just like in their old TV series. My feeling is that, considering the origins of Batman and Robin, the two of them would not turn out like the individuals in the series. I will give the makers of the series credit, they were the only TV series based on a comic-book character that remained true to its roots. Watching it was like having a comic unfold right before your eyes. You didn't get that on THE INCREDIBLE HULK and THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN.

Considering how hard it was for **Ward** to get work after BATMAN (one of the biggest things he did afterwards was photographing a fantasy layout in HUSTLER magazine), and West's work in HOOPER, THE LAST PRECINCT and the utterly horrendous ONE DARK NIGHT, I don't think that we will have to worry about the double W's turning up in the movie. Maybe **West** as Thomas Wayne will work; I can't think of anything for **Ward**.

Most of the people I know feel that **Clint Eastwood** would make a perfect Batman; I kind of lean towards **Warren Beatty**. **Beatty** certainly has Bruce Wayne's good looks, the physique, and is a better actor than **Eastwood** (please, Clint, don't come after me with the Magnum, I don't feel lucky). After all, SUPERMAN had a slightly silly TV series and ended up with three somewhat serious motion pictures. If most of the movie-going public can overcome their prejudices based on of the TV series, the movie could take off like a rocket.

Willie Holmes
8453 S. Saginaw Ave.
Chicago, IL 60617

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NEXT ISSUE: What sells like the X-Men but hasn't got a single costumed superhero? If you're not already into G.I. JOE — and don't want to know — there are some suprises in store for you from STEVE GERBER (syndicated series story editor), LARRY HAMA (comics & merchandising), and BUZZ DIXON (on the forthcoming full-length animated JOE movie feature). Fascinating behind-the-scenes quality you've come to expect — don't miss COMICS INTERVIEW #37!

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Pansafredicopacog — or **FRED** for short (which he is). He'll "acquire" anything from anywhen for you—IF the price is right.

BIANCA — Fred's partner. She's never met a lock she couldn't pick (except the ones on Fred's house).

Transformers? **Ha!** Go-Bots? **Bah!** The **FREDMOBILE** beats them all! It's a sleek, FTL car that can turn into ANYTHING (not to mention, travel through space and time)!

Fred and Bianca aren't without **enemies,** however—not one, not two, but **three** separate agencies want them!

The **INTERPOL** (Interstellar Police) agent wants them—regardless of consequences. Rambo would idolize this guy!

The **I.R.S.** (Interstellar Revenue Service) agent wants them--they haven't paid one thin credit of taxes on their ill-gotten gains!

The **REPO MAN** wants them—and the Fredmobile! It's been five years (relatively speaking) since Fred bought the car and he hasn't made a payment on time (which is ironic, when you think about it). In fact, Fred hasn't made a payment **at all!**

Now all of these "people" are converging here! Fred and Bianca have been hired to steal **Earth's greatest treasure.** Not the Mona Lisa! Not the Venus de Milo! Not even Christie Brinkley! What could it be?

Find out in —

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